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FANTASTIC Novels MAGAZINE

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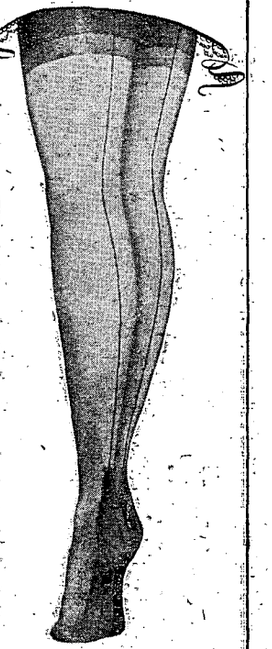

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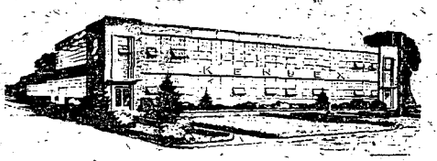

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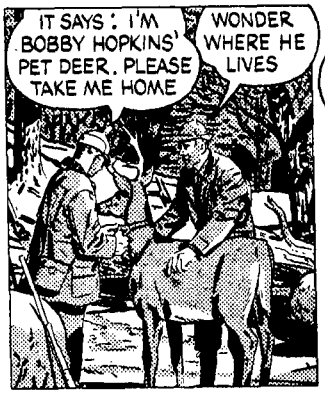

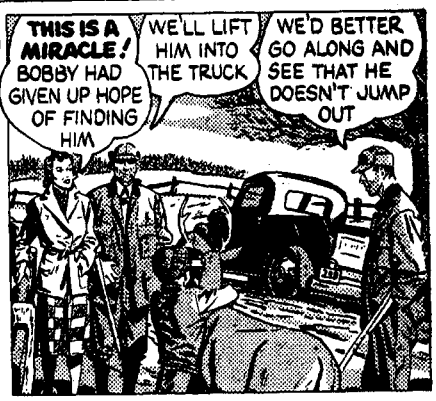
THIS IS A MIRACLE! BOBBY HAD GIVEN UP HOPE OF FINDING HIM
WE'LL LIFT HIM INTO THE TRUCK
WE'D BETTER GO ALONG AND SEE THAT HE DOESN'T JUMP OUT

DEER WON'T BE MOVIN' MUCH TILL LATE AFTERNOON. WHY NOT KNOCK OFF AND HAVE A BITE WITH US?
I'M SOLD. SUPPOSE WE COULD CLEAN UP A BIT, TOO?

WE'VE ALL THE ROOM IN THE WORLD. WHY NOT FINISH YOUR WEEK OUT HERE?
IF YOU'RE SURE WE WON'T BE CROWDING YOU
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25¢ FANTASTIC Novels MAGAZINE

Vol. 4 APRIL, 1951 No. 6

Book-Length Novel

THE TORCH.....Jack Bechdolt 14

From the Earth's dead yesterdays it shone, its flame a treason, its message hope—while its last embattled champion fought the strange inhuman civilization that had spawned him—for his birthright in the stars!

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Features

WHAT DO YOU THINK?..... 6

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Cover and inside illustrations by Lawrence.

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ABOUT OUR MAGAZINE

Dear Readers:

We are especially proud to present "The Torch" in this issue. It is one of the best and most sought after of the Munsey classics and we know that everyone will enjoy.

The policy of *Fantastic Novels* will continue the same as in the last editorial announcement in this department. The long novels from the Munsey treasure house as usual, and an addition of an occasional story from *Astonishing* and *Super Science* which have been well remembered and requested by the readers; reprints of classics from famous books and "outside" magazines.

Our sister magazine, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, has changed her surface appearance considerably, being now published in a smaller size with cut edges. It will be of interest to all fantasy readers to hear that F.F.M. will resume its illustrations by your favorite artists with the appearance of the May issue.

Yours in fantasy,
Mary Gnaedinger

LIKED MacISAAC STORY

May I congratulate you upon your selection of "The Hothouse World" in the last issue of F.N.? I found it entirely engrossing and found myself well into the evening before putting the magazine down. The author's characterizations are to be commended. Far too many of our contemporary writers are inclined to lose personality in cleverly plotted horror tales.

"The Cross of Mercrux" was superior in style to plot; but I found it worth reading for the price of the magazine.

(Continued on page 8)

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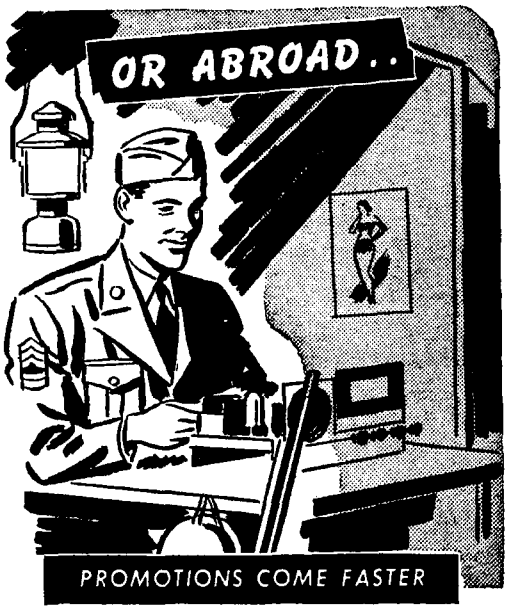

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

(Continued from page 6)

As I have only become interested in science and fantasy fiction during the last year and a quarter I will not make any other requests except to continue in your good taste for selections.

I am pleased to note that you have abandoned the "Lurid Tales" type of illustration. Shall we just forget where you lost it?

I have around thirty issues of various magazines dating from August of '49 until the present which I will sell but would prefer to trade. They are almost all in good condition and include F.N., F.F.M. *Fate, Other Worlds, Fantastic Adventures*, etc.

Roger Parris.

Post Office Box 111,
Hayesville, Ohio.

P. S. Does anyone have *Astounding* S.F. containing "Double Dyed Villains"—Anderson; F.N. containing "Minos of Sardanes;" *Planet Stories* containing "The Dead Star Rover;" A.M.F. containing "Creep, Shadow!" and *Amazing Stories* containing "Armageddon?" I will buy if they are not for trade.

"'CROSS OF MERCRUX' GOOD"

Well, I've just finished the Nov. ish of F.N. and found it pretty good.

"The Hothouse World" was pretty good. Nothing much to comment on, this one, except that in one or two spots it got kind of dry. Oh, yes. Why does there have to be that stuff called love in the stories?

"Cross of Mercrux" was a darned good short. Only trouble was it read somewhat like an adventure.

The ills. were mostly good but didn't Bok slip up when he drew the one for page 111? The hero was supposed to have on a cloak as well as a beret, was he not?

The cover was something to be desired, though it didn't agree with the story. You know, I believe that I'd actually go insane if I saw a cover that was good and described the story?

Yous stfanatically,
Douglas Mitchell

Ste. 11-406 Notre Dame Ave.,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

P.S. I'd like some fan to correspond with.

INTERESTING OFFER

I have several hundred back issues of *Fantastic Novels, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Amazing, Astounding, Fantastic Adventures, Super Science, Planet, Weird Tales* and other science fiction and fantasy magazines that I'm interested in selling or trading. Included are some of the early copies of F.N. and F.F.M. from 1940, '41, and '42. All are in good to excellent condition. Readers interested should contact me immediately as it's a matter of first come first served.

Gerry de la Ree.

277 Howland Ave.,
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(Continued on page 10)

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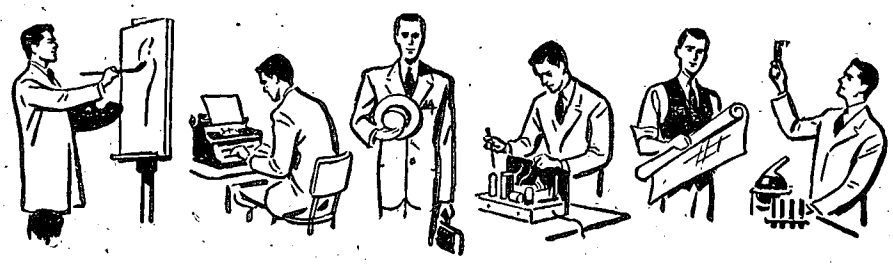

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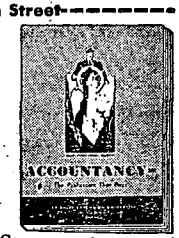

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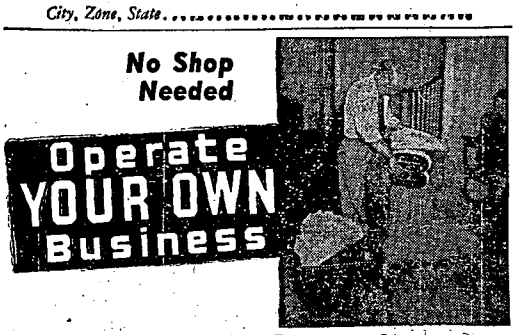

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

(Continued from page 8)

INDIANA FANS, ATTENTION!

A group in Indianapolis, Indiana, all too small at present, is attempting to contact other interested parties in Indianapolis, its vicinity, and for that matter the entire State of Indiana, who read fantasy and science fiction.

J. T. Crackel.

3141 Boulevard Pl.,
Indianapolis, Ind.

PLEASANT READING

Your lead novel is worthy of first place! "The Hothouse World" is pleasant reading, for the most, but the scenes following upon the wakening of Putnam were a little stiff and formal.

Finlay didn't do a good job of drawing for it either; this is the kind of thing Paul should work with. Paul would have given us a view or two of the Putnam Community Dome, some of the characters, the plane, the attack of the outsiders. Etcetera.

I was very glad to read about the retreat of the ice. It seemed like the advance of spring, which, for me, is never too soon.

"Cross of Mercrux" is a story full of loose ends. No explanation of how a medieval culture could produce a man like Mercrux who in turn could develop the high level of scientific inventions at his command. Nor just what his intents were in coming into our side of the time probabilities. The whole thing began like one of Flint and Hall's stories, ended with a lot of questions unanswered. Bok did a good job, though he could have shown us the charging horses with the chariot full of saints, strongmen, pretty damsels and Grantley.

The cover is not much of a guide to the contents. Makes one think "The Hothouse World" must be a miniature culture of unwilling dwarfs, shrunken by the mad scientist pouring blood from a test-tube into a beaker over the helpless victim.

I agree with Snevets about a change in the cover and removing the lightning flash.

Bob Barnett.

1107 Lyon,
Carthage, Mo.

DISCUSSING THE PAST YEAR

I'd like to take this opportunity to heartily second Claude Held's request for the reprinting of Frank Aubrey's "Devil Tree of El Dorado."

Well, it didn't happen—what I'd hoped for: that the last 1950 issue of F.N. would top the other five issues. The January issue with "The Flying Legion" was topped by the next, Cumming's "Man Who Mastered Time," and so on, until the September number and the last story of the Polaris trilogy. This story was the topper, and after reading this month's novel, "The Hothouse World," it's still the best of the 1950 stories.

Not that "Hothouse World" wasn't good. It

(Continued on page 12)

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

(Continued from page 10)

was. I'd put it alongside Kuttner and Moore's "Earth's Last Citadel." But there weren't enough illustrations, only three, and of those three, only the one on page 67 is worth mentioning.

The only thing I liked about "Cross of Mercrux" was Bok's illos. Why not get Bok to illustrate a complete issue? I'm hoping.

I'd like to air some opinions about old and new fantasy and science-fantasy authors. Brought on by reading Shelby Vick's letter in the October F.F.M.

First, I'd like to say that I agree with Shelby that present-day authors, at least most of them, are just as good as "the old masters." Here's why I think that some of them, though, can't measure up to the standards of the older writers.

One reason is their inability to make their story-characters act like real people. Their characters seem about as real as Howdy Doody. The stories are filled to the overflowing with cosmic conflicts, giant space-ships, rays of every description, beams, planes, augers and cylinders—and heroes who act heroic all the time, not to mention utterly evil villains. As for a plot it's bad-gets-beat, and boy-gets-girl. If science-fantasy is never recognized as literature, it will be due to the efforts of these authors.

The old-timers, or the majority of them, made their characters live, and their plots, in those days, could be fairly original. Then, too, they didn't use the wise-cracking a lot of present-day authors inject into their stories.

In choosing my favorite present-day authors, I'd put C. S. Lewis at the top of the list. His trilogy, "Out of the Silent Planet," "Perelandra," and "That Hideous Strength" is literate science-fantasy if ever it has been written. Others would be Nelson Bond, A. E. Van Vogt, Theodore Sturgeon, John Taine, Jack Williamson and Henry Kuttner.

As to authors of the past, I'm partial to Merritt and Lovecraft in the fantasy and supernatural stories. Weinbaum's science-fiction is as good as any today, but is topped by H. G. Wells' stories, especially Mr. Wells' shorts and novelettes. Most of Wells' long novels have too much socialism in them for the average reader, including myself.

I never did like Haggard, though, and Burroughs' stories suffer from lack of characterization, but are enjoyable reading as straight action stories, and aren't cluttered with too much pseudo-science gadgetry.

I had a lot more to say on the subject, but what I've already written will probably cover me in brickbats so I'd better close. I'm looking forward to another year of enjoyable reading with F.N. and F.F.M. You're starting F.N. off right in the New Year by lining up Zagat's "Drink We Deep."

Robert Fultz.

Rt. 1, Box 334,
Tamms, Ill.

(Continued on page 106)

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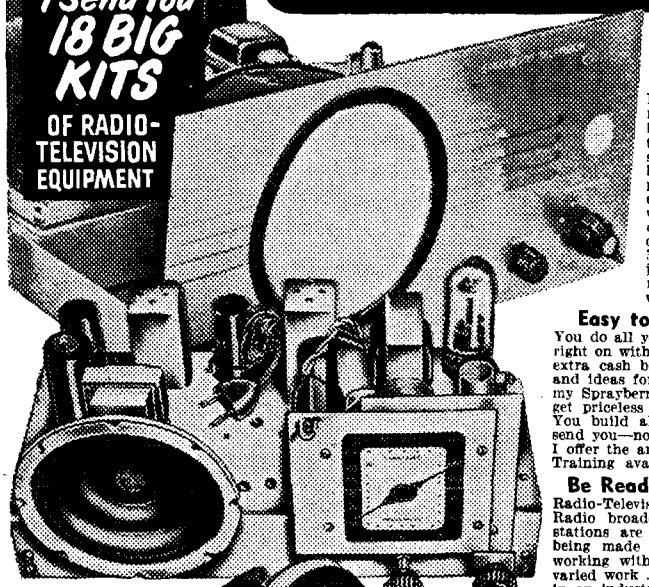

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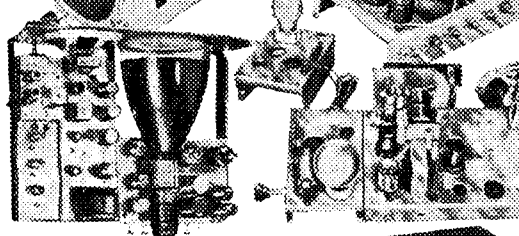

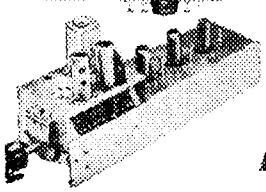

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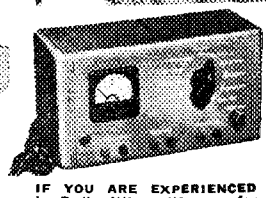

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THE TORCH

By Jack Bechdolt

From the Earth's dead yesterdays it shone, its flame a treason, its message hope—while its last embattled champion fought the strange inhuman civilization that had spawned him—for his birthright in the stars!

PROLOGUE

IN OUR own happy day it is difficult for us to realize conditions on this continent during the Dark Ages, especially in those blackest years early in the century two thousand. To fully appreciate the tragedy of the American people one must realize that previous to this time, when all the world groped through the gloom of savagery, there was a civilization on this earth almost, if not fully, as far advanced as that of this year 3010.

Recent archeological research has proved this beyond a doubt, and the skeptical reader is referred to official reports of the excavations among the ruins of cities along the Pacific coast, where, because all life seems to have been extinguished instantly by the great catastrophe, it has been possible to uncover almost intact the evidence of a state of society that apparently lacked nothing of the material advantages we enjoy to-day.

Modern science has identified the great

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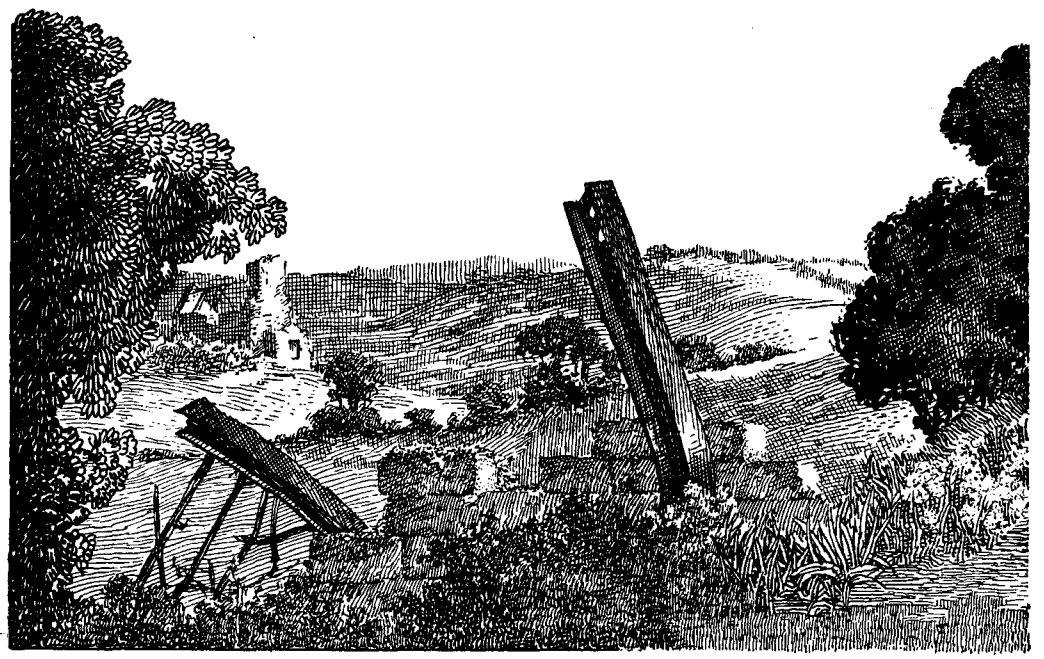

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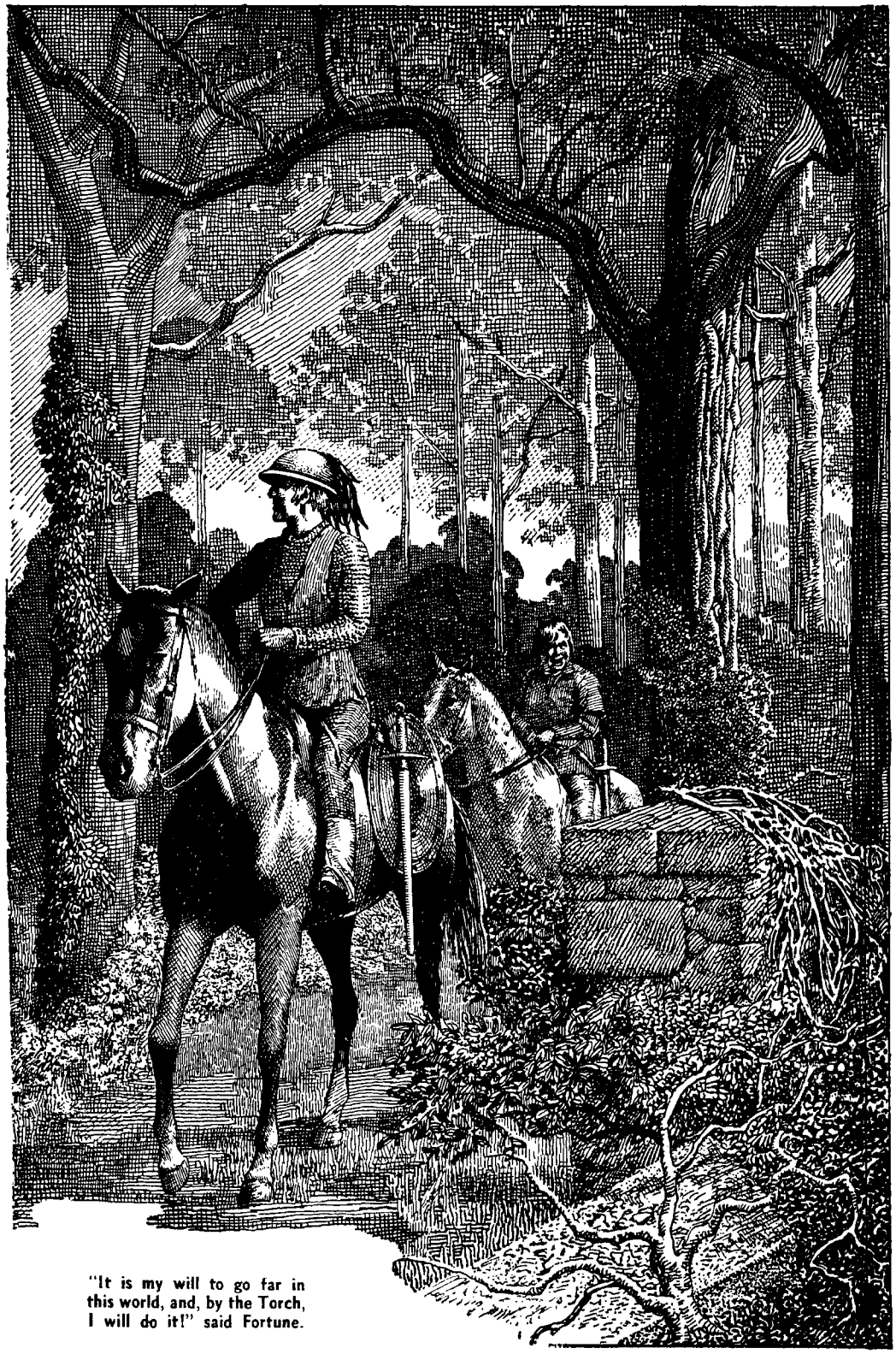

"It is my will to go far in this world, and, by the Torch, I will do it!" said Fortune.

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catastrophe of the ancients (authorities have definitely fixed the date between the years A. D. 1980 and 1989) as the visitation to the solar system of a sky wanderer of the same nature as several of the greatest known comets, though probably vastly larger and more powerful in its influence on terrestrial life.

At the time of that visitation men had come to depend entirely on what the ancients termed *electrical energy*. There is little doubt that this *electricity* of those days is the same energy of the spheres which is the keystone of our complex society, though in that day it is plain men knew absolutely nothing of its source or characteristics. Humanity had harnessed a servant of which it was densely ignorant, and upon that servant depended for transportation, communication, heat, light, and health. The universal use of *electricity* had supplanted all earlier and clumsier machinery of society.

Knowing this, we can easily understand how the visit of the great comet almost instantly paralyzed that simpler civilization and threw the world into chaos.

Probably this one mechanical fact was the chief reason for the complete breakdown of all society, though there are grounds for belief that unsettled political conditions, long in ferment, played some part in the catastrophe. And surely there is proof, even to-day, of the terrible visitation of earth shakings and storms which, within a brief space of time, reduced the proudest cities of that distant past.

The author of this tale has endeavored to present a truthful picture of human life as it was in the saddest time of world history, basing his descriptions on ancient manuscripts and the testimony of the latest scientific investigation. We know it to have been a time of dense ignorance and superstition. Learning, in the shape of the few written records that survived the great catastrophe, was in the hands of a few, who used it for their own selfish advantage.

The little communities were isolated, one from another. There was no commerce nor means of communication save on foot or by frail, water-borne vessel. The wild beasts of the great American jungles rendered the first means almost out of the question, and ignorance of modern marine construction limited the second to a narrow radius of inland waters.

The miserable remnants of a great race huddled in the ruins of what had once been proud cities, their life a perpetual struggle against nature and their own kind; their society the most primitive state of absolute monarchy; ignorant, superstitious and seemingly hopeless. Yet these were our ancestors. In such a time were born such thinkers as Zorn the Recluse, justly termed Father of Freedom, and Mary of the Isle, revered to-day wherever freemen walk.

And in the ruin of the statue of the Great Woman, unseen by men, yet guiding their lives, flamed The Torch, burning clear and free with a fire immortal.

CHAPTER I

THE ROAD TO FAME

ON A lovely spring day in a time long ago—God grant its like may never return—a young soldier sat in the saddle and turned his face toward a promised reward.

He had accomplished his first great deed, and he went to meet the future, confident of himself and his own lofty ambition.

The young man's name was Fortune. He was the son of Karl the Strong, once an over-captain in the army of the Tower People of Manhattan, and one Irma, a mother descended of soldiers.

Among comrades and through the ranks of his command this Fortune was nicknamed "The White," because of his pale, yellow hair and unusually fair skin, a skin that sun and wind seemed to leave untanned. Armed though he was in steel helmet and chain mail, that white skin and the healthy pink in his cheek made him seem effeminate.

But Fortune stood six feet one in his soft leather shoes; there were few sword arms more skilled than his, and in battle his wide-set and rather large gray eyes burned black with a wicked madness that made men afraid.

Fortune's basin-shaped steel helmet bore a cock's feather, half of its white length dyed crimson, the insignia of a petty-captaincy. His jacket was of light chain mail, as soft as linen. A light shield, on which was painted the crest of the Tower People, hung from his saddle bow. Soft boots of ocher hue clad his legs.

His arms and equipment glowed from polishing, for Petty-captain Fortune was answering the summons of Wenn, commander of the armies, and if luck served him, he might appear before Wolff, the Great Towerman who ruled the island of

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Manhattan and everything on it. For this was Fortune, known in that year 2078 as the hero of the great wall, and he had clad himself in a manner proper to one who has a great tale to tell.

With the young petty-captain rode a squat, roly-poly body-servant whose broad face, snub nose, twinkling little eyes, and wide, thick-lipped mouth told of ignorant good nature, though they gave little hint of the man's real courage and steadfast devotion. His name was Ham.

Before daylight Fortune had left his post of duty on the Northern Wall. Almost a year he had spent in service on the great barricade men had built to hold back the wilder men who lived Out Beyond. His tower was at the junction of the North River and the Swift Ditch, the Harlem River of the ancient day. Between the wall and great hall of Wolff lay a good day's journey by dangerous and almost impassable road.

It was a strange sort of road that wound its length through dark and wild forest where the jungle growth of vine and creeper and ivy intertwined and hedged the larger hardwood trees. For centuries man had traveled that path. Once it had been a highway of the old civilization, and its length bore mute evidence of former glory.

A part of their way was marked by the rusted uprights of what had once been an overhead train-way, a sad and ragged reminder of the days before the Great Catastrophe. Always the horse's hoofs were turning up through the mire bits of stone and steel and brick, twisted scraps of rod and bolt and potsherd. Ever as they rode, Fortune and his man could distinguish in the fantastic forms of grapevine and creeper grotesque resemblances to the shattered walls they masked. Sometimes, from an eminence, looking across the green undulations of forest, they noted the jagged tooth of an old tower or wall that still defied the elements.

Accustomed as they were to such sights, they avoided them as unpleasant, and they spurred a little faster past those occasional cases in the greenery where still a few scarred shells of what had once been homes held back the jungle, for these were charnel houses filled with white bones, and dreaded by all men of that dark day.

They rode where once had stood the world's proudest city, the New York of the ancients, stirring from the mud evidence of a civilization too fine for their intelligence to comprehend. Flattened into ruins by the Great Catastrophe of 1989, almost a hundred years had worked with Time's slow tools to disperse the city's dust until the name itself was forgotten and the place was called Manhattan after the island.

The old civilization was gone, wiped out in the Great Catastrophe; the new was not yet born. History can tell of no blacker hour since the race began.

The descendants of the millions who once inhabited the island huddled for shelter at the lower end of the land, where it meets the sea. There lived the Tower People, amid the faded glories of a time as splendid, at least, as our own happy day; finding their refuge in the few great walls that had survived destruction. Yet there, beneath the earth, closed in from the free air, existed those miserable beings they held in slavery—the Folk of Manhattan.

How many they made in all it is difficult to say. There is no record. Fifty thousand souls would be overstating the number. Of these the Tower People were considerably a minority, yet from their Great Hall they extended an iron-handed government to every corner of the island. Theirs was the government which Fortune served.

Head of this government was Wolff, the Great Towerman, the "highest born," and under him that directorate of political officers who fattened themselves and their kind by the slavery of men of their own race.

And beneath them came the rank above industrial slavery—the military caste to which belonged Petty-captain Fortune.

This was the day and the age in which Fortune rode with his man Ham, but saving a superstitious avoidance of the dust of death along their way, they gave place and time little thought, for it was as familiar a part of their normal world as the sun and the clouds. Their minds were busy with their own affairs.

AS HE rode, Ham sang a tuneless rhyme, repeating it monotonously and with evident satisfaction:

"Fortune the White—
Fortune the White—
Shall rule in might
Till the Torch burns bright."

His master turned on him with a sudden frown of impatience, the heavy riding-whip lashed out at Ham, and Fortune said

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sharply, "Leave done with that foolishness. When we go to the Great Hall I want that ugly mouth kept closed—"

"I sing only what all men sing," Ham grumbled aggrievedly.

"Let no man sing it again," warned the petty-captain. "I will not be made a mock of."

"Men say it is an old prophecy, and true," Ham defended. "Even the children say—"

The lash raised a cloud of dust from the shoulders of Ham's leather jacket. "I promise, captain," he shouted. "I promise, but if the children—"

"Because it happens my name is ridiculous no one shall dare mock me," the young soldier grumbled, on his dignity. "I will make folk hold their tongues."

Ham was quiet a few moments, but his relations with his master were, because of recent events, more those of comrade than servant. Soon he grinned and said, "When you become an over-captain I shall take a plump woman for my wife and get me a new horse."

"And if I should become the commander?" Fortune laughed.

"Oh, then I shall have a dozen fine women to choose from."

"You are very sure of your future," mocked Fortune.

"Why not? Doesn't the old prophecy say you shall rule till the Torch burns—"

"Will you forget that idiocy?" stormed the captain. He added sarcastically, "Better say, 'When the Torch burns,' for that is never."

"But you are the hero of the wall," Ham argued. "Wolff will make you great for what we did there."

"Remember the old saying," his master warned. "'When the mighty give thanks it is only because they hope for more.' But for all that, we will become great, Ham. It is my will to go far and rise high, and by the Torch I will do it! Something in me tells me that."

Fortune was not an idle braggart. His father had nothing to leave him except an over-captain's right to enter a son in the cadet's school of the Directorate. Fortune's active service in a small command had lasted little more than a year, and already he had gained fame. Besides, he was going to Wolff possessed of a secret which he believed exclusively his own, a secret of possible political importance, one that an ambitious young man might use for his advancement. He believed implicitly in his own ability.

Ham greeted his words with a grin. "Like master like man," said he. "Then I, too, will live in a tower and kick the folk out of my path when I go out. You will not forget me then, captain?"

"I am not ungrateful," Fortune declared. "I shall remember that you saved my life, not once, but six times in the fight on the wall. I will remember that."

"Ho-ho," crowed Ham. "I'd give my horse to be there when you tell it to Wolff. That will be a tale—how Engard played the traitor though he knew from the spies that the Wild Folk were about to attack; how—"

Fortune frowned again. "Ham," he ordered, "when you are at the Great Hall remember what I told you; hold your tongue. Little pitchers have large spouts and spill too much. Let me talk; I will tell it—"

"But captain, surely you will tell how Engard took a Towerman's half of our men away!"

"I will tell what I think best." More to himself than to Ham, Fortune puzzled, "Engard is only a tool of a greater hand. Now, whose hand was it? Who could profit by weakening the defense of the wall, and how could he profit? If I knew whose seal was on that message that came to Engard, then I would know something! What wouldn't I give to own a friend in Wolff's guard—a man who would know all the gossip of the Great Hall? I am walking blindfolded, but armed with a powerful weapon, if I knew how to use it!

"As for you, Ham, hold your tongue, or I'll send you back among the Folk in the Under City; yes, in the Drains, where the damp will kill you slowly by terrible cramps."

But Ham paid no attention to the threat. "I see men riding," he interrupted.

Just ahead of them the road made a sharp turn to avoid the ruins of what had once been a magnificent building of stone. Rounding this turn, they came upon five men who awaited them in the recess of a great, arched door.

One man stood out from the group because of his flashing chain mail and helmet, the trappings of his horse, and his red beard that spilled across a mighty chest and glistened in the sun like new copper.

"Look," gasped Ham, "it's Frederick—the comptroller!"

The man they encountered was one of the most forceful figures of his time. Our history gives us but an inadequate picture

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of the Great Comptroller Frederick and little explanation of his power. We know that the root of that power was his grasp of the sketchy financial system of the day, a system based on the production of the slaving folk.

Money in its present form had only a limited circulation among the Tower People, yet it served as counters in the amazing game of duplicity that held Americans in subjection. Because he was master of that complicated system of falsehoods that assured the Folk they were paid for their production, and at the same time robbed them of all reward under guise of taxation in various forms, Frederick had risen to a position that made him feared by Wolff himself. By all logic of the time he was the natural successor to Wolff in the office of Towerman.

THIS great man, though he dressed as a soldier, looked more the statesman. His peculiar, whitish face was long and narrow across the temples. His brown eyes were wrinkled about with lines of cunning, and took a light that made them seem at times as coppery as his beard. For all his fine height and breadth of shoulder and chest, Frederick, best feared and best hated of the Directorate, looked like the shrewd fox rather than the predatory wolf.

The party under the arch waited the coming of Fortune and his man with evident interest. At Ham's warning Fortune had put his hand to his sword for defense. Now he drew the blade and raised it, perpendicular, in salute. He hoped very much to be able to ride past Frederick without words, but on a sign from him he halted.

They rode close to Frederick, and the comptroller greeted Fortune suavely. "If I am not mistaken, this is that Fortune of the wall whose name is in all men's mouths?"

"I am Fortune." The petty-captain bowed.

"Give me your hand, Fortune! The Tower People are proud of such soldiers as you."

Fortune trusted his palm to the other's cold, firm grasp, and the men with Frederick brought their swords to a smart salute that set chain mail and plate armor to clinking and clanking.

Fortune flushed slightly at the honor, but he set his lips in a firm line, and with chin high and eye flashing, took what he considered his due.

"Young man—" The comptroller's voice was smooth as cream. "You ride to Wenn, and I know your errand is urgent; but you must pardon an old man's curiosity if I detain you. I am thirsty to hear the tale of that fight. Ride with me a short way and tell it while I wait for my men to get food ready. Then you must join us at bread."

Any young captain would have given his head for such recognition, but Fortune tempered his elation with a resolve to be cautious. If he told what he knew it would be in order to learn more. He made a sign to Ham to stay behind, and the two walked their horses down the road. "Now," invited Frederick.

"Sir," said the petty-captain, "it is a short thing to say. Five days ago we on the wall heard from our spies that the Wild Folk planned a raid on our towers at that end of the wall where the Swift Ditch meets the North River. I summoned all the men under me—"

"How many men?"

"Half a company, sir—"

"And where were the rest—and Engard, their captain?"

Fortune shifted uneasily in the saddle, but he met the comptroller's burning glance eye to eye. "Engard and half the command were withdrawn a short time after the warning came. I had but—"

"And by whose order was Engard withdrawn?"

Frederick's voice was smooth with the cold, hard smoothness of steel.

"Sir, I—" Fortune mended his intention. "I have heard it said—" he evaded.

The comptroller brushed aside the words. "Tell me only what you know; let others repeat rumors," he advised.

"A message came to Engard—a message bearing a certain seal," Fortune began.

"You saw this message?"

"I held it in my hand. The messenger came to me seeking Engard."

"You would know the device of that seal again?"

The eyes of the two men exchanged sharp glances: from Frederick a stern warning; from the petty-captain defiance. "I would," Fortune averred.

The comptroller laid his hand affectionately on the young man's arm and spoke softly, his cool, cultivated voice sounding a persuasive chord. "Young captain," he advised, "you are on the road to power. You are young and brave, and I think you are ambitious. Perhaps you know the old rhyme the children sing:

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"Fortune the White—
Fortune the White—"

Fortune's cheeks burned under Frederick's smiling regard. "I know the rhyme," he admitted briefly.

"And you believe in the prophecy?"

"Only the Folk, in their ignorance, believe such foolery," Fortune protested.

"Surely," the comptroller agreed easily, but added to himself: "But the Folk are many more than all of us together, and powerful in their ignorance." He continued paternally, "You are ambitious—I can see it—and I admire ambition. Well, you will go far, for you held the wall against a superior force, and that has brought your name favorably before Wolff himself. Ah, it is splendid to be young, with a career and fame ahead of one. I envy you. You will surely rise—*if you are discreet.*"

"Discreet, sir?"

"Let me advise you, young captain," the comptroller soothed. "If I had a son I would counsel him in just such a way. Zeal is worthy of its pay; but discretion to a man who is ambitious, ah, that is priceless! Some things it is well to remember; others are better forgotten. For instance, if my son were in your place, anxious to rise high and wield great power, I would advise him concerning that message you mention, that he forget it, or at least that he forget the seal it bore."

"But, sir, Engard knows, he himself—"

"Engard?" mused Frederick. "Oh, Engard is dead."

"Dead?" cried Fortune. "You are mistaken. I left him this very morning, very much alive."

"Nevertheless," Frederick repeated with calm assurance, "Engard is dead." He glanced at the sun, rising almost to noon. "Yes, surely by this time Engard is dead. Later, when you hear the news, remember who told you."

Fortune glanced incredulously into the foxlike face of the great man smiling paternally upon him. He wondered for a moment if there was some double meaning in his words—some subtlety that had escaped him.

HOW could Engard be dead? If he was dead, how could the comptroller know when Fortune, who had seen Engard a few hours ago, had traveled without delay as far as this meeting?

And if Engard was dead, in what way had he died? Frederick seemed to know, judging by his manner, and perhaps Frederick had caused that death! The comptroller's certainty suggested as much; but Fortune did not dare to put the questions to him.

The red-bearded man, sitting his black horse so magnificently, smiled in kindly fashion down on him, and Fortune felt the warmth vanish from the spring noon; the sunlight and the green trees about him, the blue sky in which floated a few baby clouds—even the honest smell of earth and new life seemed to mask dangers. He shivered.

But Fortune was young, and he had assurance. After all, why should he credit this man's word? "If Engard is dead," he observed coolly, steadying his voice by an effort, "that leaves but me with the memory of that message and its seal. May I ask, sir, why it would be discreet to forget?"

"It is not always wise to ask why." Frederick measured his words impressively. "But suppose we guess that none will be the happier for hearing what you might tell. Suppose we say that to tell it might make you a powerful enemy."

"And if I keep silent—" Fortune had a feeling that he was driving a bargain.

"You might make a powerful friend."

"My allegiance, sir, is to Wolff and to him only."

"Surely, do your duty, captain." The comptroller exhibited sudden indifference.

"Even to telling him of that message that came to Engard, the message that withdrew half our force—and the seal on the message?"

"Let no man withhold truth from the Great Towerman," said Frederick. "Remember, I counsel nobody to divide his allegiance."

"But, sir—"

"I have merely offered you advice," Frederick completed his sentence. "I have counseled you as I would my own son. I would like to be your friend, Captain Fortune, to see you advance. Think over what I have said, and meantime we will break bread."

The great man put a period to their discussion. He turned his horse about and led the way toward his party. A number of servants had come up and were spreading food on a cloth that had been laid on the grass.

Following the comptroller, Fortune thought over their talk carefully. That there had been treachery of some sort on the wall was common talk. Bold men

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whispered that some higher power, some man close to the Great Towerman himself, had, for reasons of his own, deliberately withdrawn half the defense from the very point where the Wild Folk attacked. Their attack had failed only because Fortune was young and rash and ambitious, and luck had been on his side.

The identity of this great intriguer was a mystery to the defenders of the wall, as great a mystery as was his motive. Fortune had told no one of the device on that sealed message that had come to his over-captain, Engard. That secret he was saving, convinced that it might be used in some way toward his own advancement.

Not being a fool, the young man saw that the comptroller knew the identity of the sender of that message, and was interested in shielding him. The Directorate bubbled with hidden intrigues. It might even be that Frederick himself had pulled the wires that almost cost them the strong north wall; or again Frederick might be testing Fortune's loyalty to his masters.

Fortune felt that he was walking blindfolded on the edge of a dangerous cliff.

But he also determined stubbornly to hold to what he knew until he had made a more definite bargain than the comptroller had offered.

They lingered an hour at the noon meal, Frederick suave and graceful; his officers reflecting a corresponding urbanity toward the guest, and the guest in a fever either to solve the riddle forthwith or be on his way to Wolff, where he hoped to learn something.

At last the comptroller set the example by rising from their picnic table.

"We must part, young captain," said he, giving Fortune his hand. "Your story has interested me greatly, but it seems that you have left one point untold, one question unanswered."

The significant look that accompanied his words warned Fortune he expected a promise of discretion.

"Sir," answered Fortune, fencing, "I am humbly grateful for your friendship and counsel. I am not sure that I understand one thing clearly."

"Ah, I am sorry I have not the time to go into more details."

"You cannot be more definite?"

"I can only offer you advice—such as I gave you."

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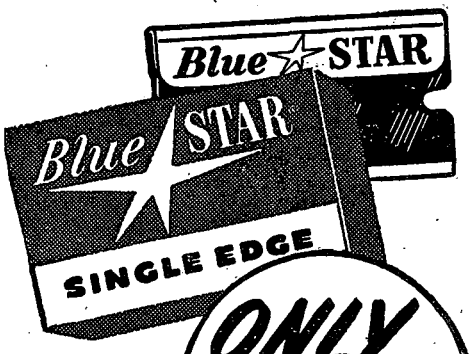

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"Then," answered Fortune with a deep breath, as a man takes a plunge, "I am sorry, but I have answered all the questions I can answer any man save Wolff himself."

The comptroller smiled with a careless air that suggested Fortune's veiled defiance was a matter of supreme indifference. "As you please." He nodded. "I am sure the Towerman will reward such devotion—if he knows. A speedy and safe journey to you, young captain."

Host and guest exchanged a salute, and Fortune and Ham rode on toward the city and the Great Hall of Wolff.

Ham mumbled his tuneless songs and grinned in anticipation of delights to come, but Fortune was left puzzling over his dismissal. Frederick's last phrase: "If he knows" was almost in the nature of a threat.

HAM put a question that evidently he had been revolving in his slow mind. "What did the old Red Fox want of us?"

"Something for nothing," said Fortune briefly.

"Then he didn't get it."

"No, nor will he unless I see the price first."

Ham shook his head doubtfully. "The fox is shrewd and powerful," he muttered. "Folk say that even great men fear him—shrewd and mighty is the old Red Fox. Be careful."

"Thanks," answered his master dryly. "I'll manage my own affairs. And you, Ham, remember what I told you—be silent."

"I am deaf and dumb," Ham declared vigorously.

"No, not deaf, too," Fortune advised. "I want you to use those ears of yours—they're big enough—and your eyes, they can see far—and tell me all you see and hear, for men are not afraid to talk before one who looks so stupid as you."

Toward mid-afternoon they heard the sound of an ax in the forest. The road dipped suddenly between high banks of rock so that they were walled in. They came to where a great oak had been felled in such a way it had dropped into the cut and completely blocked their passage.

When they caught sight of this obstruction seven road-menders were bustling about the huge log which seemed to have wedged itself among the rocks. At Fortune's shout the seven turned to gape at them.

They were a stupid lot, seemingly all of the Folk of the Under City, dull-witted slaves of the Great Directorate. They were squat and powerful of body, dull of eye, and indescribably dirty, with matted hair and smudged skins. They were dressed in the coarse, blue garb of the commonest of the laborers, and each wore a brass bracelet fitted snugly about his left wrist, the mark of his place and cantonment.

"Make room, make room!" shouted Ham, pushing ahead. "We ride on Wolff's business."

One man, who seemed to be the leader, raised his hand in token of understanding and grunted an order. The other six seized levers and pried the big log high enough for them to take hand hold and raise it slowly.

Then the six, one at a time, stooped under the log at one end, and advancing slowly, staggering with its weight, levered the big end upward until there was room for a horse and man to pass.

Fortune's horse, a nervous beast, shied away from the obstruction. A half-dozen times the young captain spurred close to the log, but the horse refused to pass beneath it. Fortune dismounted in a bad temper, and leading the horse, walked under the bridging trunk.

When he was directly beneath the obstruction the nervous horse leaped and reared, there was a shout from the men, and simultaneously Fortune jumped, quick as light, to avoid the menacing hoofs.

With a crash that shook the rocks the huge log dropped. Fortune was thrown forward on his face, struck by a branch of the tree. As he fell he was conscious of a shrill scream of animal agony, a confusion of shouts, and a warning cry from Ham that rose above all the sounds.

The oak had struck him a glancing blow on the shoulder, and no harm was done. Fortune rolled to his feet, and instantly comprehended that he had barely escaped death.

Beneath the great trunk his horse lay dead. The seven men were all living and drawn in a group, watching him. From the opposite side of the barrier he could hear Ham cursing loudly.

Fortune was in a fine rage.

"You dogs and spawn of dogs," he shouted, "I'll teach you to be careful of Wolff's captains!"

He ran at the group with his heavy riding-whip raised.

Six of the men ran, but the seventh

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sprang to meet him, and, as if by magic, a sword appeared from beneath his long blouse.

Fortune hurled his whip after the retreating men and flashed his own sword from its scabbard. He was barely in time to catch his adversary's murderous blow and turn it.

Sparks flew from the clashing steel. His wide eyes black with anger, Fortune pressed forward recklessly, driving down the other's defense with a mad impetuosity that forced him back, step by step against the rocks.

"On boys, on boys—get him!" The mysterious swordsman in laborer's dress shouted like a man accustomed to command.

With a scattering yell, from the greenery above the rocks, the six who had retreated sprang down into the fight, bringing axes and clubs in their hands. They charged the petty-captain.

Now it was Fortune who had his back to the rocks. He had no time to choose a position, but leaped blindly and faced the mob.

His shining blade fell with a force that beat down the other's weapon and caught him across the shoulder. From the jar of that blow Fortune knew the steel had met steel. His opponent's blue denim covered chain mail.

Armed with that knowledge, he struck again, aiming high, and the blade pierced at the base of the neck.

Even as he realized he had dealt a death wound, Fortune staggered beneath a buffet from an ugly club. An ax was aimed at his thigh and its keen blade ripped open his leather boot. A rock crashed against his helmet.

The six snarled about him like a pack of dogs about a cornered fox. Leaping out of range of the singing sword, they thrust with their clubs, hurled rocks, and threw the keen-edged axes. A trickle of red blood ran from Fortune's cheek, and one eye began to swell shut where a stone had caught him. In his giddiness the solid earth seemed to rise at him in waves like the sea.

Then from behind the road-menders came a bellow of warning as Ham hurled himself from the fallen trunk into the fight.

HAM'S sword had time to thrust but once, and the six were in flight. One of them limped from a cut in the leg. The roly-poly man-at-arms fairly trumpeted in his rage as he chased the scattering mob. Fortune, seeing dimly, was aware that Ham had cut down the wounded man. Then his knees weakened and he slid to the earth, fighting against an overwhelming nausea.

"They're gone," Ham was shouting in his ear, "may their bones boil in everlasting fires! Come, captain, how is it with you?"

Ham helped his master to rise. From his flask that hung at his belt he gave him water, and Fortune presently declared himself normal.

"I'll have a look at this carrion," he cried, bending over the dead swordsman. "Since when, I wonder, have the Folk been given swords and chain mail to battle in?"

He ripped away the blue denim cloth and exposed the dead man's shirt of mail. "Look, Ham," he bade; "look at this hand. White and hard, but straight in the fingers, and clean, too! That is no dog from the Under City."

"Ah, and what's this?" shouted Ham, snatching at a cord around the dead man's neck. "Look, captain!"

Ham held up in his palm a gold ring. It had been fastened to a loop of cord and hidden under the mailed shirt.

Fortune examined the ring with keen interest. It was cleverly carved on one side in the fashion of a coiled snake. The work was from a master jeweler's hand.

But what made Fortune catch his breath was the knowledge that that same coiled snake was the device which had sealed the note sent to his over-captain Engard—the note that preceded treachery on the Great Wall. Again he was facing that mystery.

"Have a look at your man," he directed Ham, and slipped the gold ring over his finger.

The other fellow was a dirty nondescript, plainly one of the Folk.

"Then there's no more to be learned here," Fortune decided. "Is your horse alive?"

Ham's horse was safe. With a vast amount of labor they got it over the oak tree that blocked the road.

"Another march for me," grumbled Ham. "Well, I'm old and tough!"

"No need," his master ordered quickly. "Get up behind me; you deserve that much. This makes the seventh time—and I will not forget, Ham."

"Good," grunted Ham, rolling his eyes in gratitude. "Now I know I shall live in

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a tower when you become a great person."

Ham's horse, carrying double, did little better than a rapid walk. Frequently now they came to a road that was paved with old stone, but mostly this was paving that dated beyond the Great Catastrophe, and so ragged from age and hard to use that it was worse than none. But it served as a mile-post in their progress, and they were relieved to know that by nightfall they could reach the Great Hall of Wolff.

"What did a road-mender with a sword?" Ham exclaimed after a long silence.

"Ah," said Fortune with a sarcasm lost on his man, "you noticed that? And chain mail, too."

"Yes, and a gold ring!"

"Some rogue who killed his master and robbed him," suggested Fortune. He did not share all his secrets with the loquacious Ham.

"Such things are bad," muttered Ham, shaking his head. "Bad; very bad. There are too many folk rebelling lately. It's not like the good old days. They say that Wolff—"

"Leave that unsaid," Fortune warned him. "Who are you to speak at all of Wolff?"

Fortune pulled their horse to a stop at the summit of a long hill. He pointed silently to what lay beyond.

"The great city," he exclaimed with a happy sigh. "And I have been no closer for almost a year!"

THE slope of the eminence had been partially cleared of its jungle, and they could see out across some miles of the greenery. The picture glowed fair in the golden afternoon sun; gentle rolling hills covered with verdure much as before for a stretch of several miles, except that more of the ruined walls broke their even flow of line.

But beyond that, taller walls rose, one or two to a great height, and there were signs of smoke that told these shells sheltered human life.

And faintly blue against the limpid blue of the sky they saw a slender spire that thrust upward like a sword blade at salute, Wolff's Tower.

"Beautiful!" cried Fortune. "Something fine awaits us there; I know it!"

"Ho!" Ham shouted boisterously. "Food and drink, and a soft bed. Fine clothing, and perhaps that plump maid!"

Fortune spurred their horse impatiently.

Several miles more and the forest thinned out and fell behind them for long stretches. Their road became a hard street with a semblance of buildings, mostly empty, at either side, crumbling walls, blackened by fires and split by earth shocks.

Great heaps of rubbish frequently turned their horse from the straight path. Fallen walls had blocked the street, and in other places it gaped in vast, ragged holes where the masonry had dropped into ditches that ran underneath.

By token of a once lovely column, broken in half its length, and surrounded by the battered torsos of carved stone figures, they knew they had reached the Towerman's Road, the same thoroughfare that the ancients before their time knew as the Broad Way of the once imperial city.

Now they passed an occasional rude cart piled high with green vegetables or goods, and each drawn by a dozen of the blue-clad Folk yoked to its long tongue. With their progress these moved slowly out of their path, the overseers who rode on them coming to a rigid salute at sight of Fortune's red-and-white feather of rank; the panting men who dragged them rolling their eyes and staring mightily.

Added to the traffic of slow-moving carts, as they neared their goal, were occasional officers like Fortune, mounted and accompanied by servants who rode or ran behind. Then, too, appeared gilded chairs, each borne high on poles by two runners in livery, its curtains hiding some woman of consequence.

They passed numerous gangs of road-menders, and now and then artisans tearing down old walls or building the old stones into new ones.

Commanding a great open space surrounded by several buildings of magnificent height and fair preservation, they saw a square tower that overshadowed everything about it. The eye of a scientist or student of ruins would have noted that once this tower must have risen even a third higher than its present stature. Its roof was flat and rude, incongruous to the noble architecture of the walls, and evidently makeshift. But still it was imposing.

In ancient days the space before this tower evidently had been a large public square or plaza. A tangle of unkempt greenery told the story of what once had been a fine park, and just north of this

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stood a vast and noble arch of stone, broken in its height, but compelling admiration even in ruin. The place was a little below midway of the island, and the northern outskirt of the city as men knew it in Fortune's day.

From the tower roof flew the flag of the Comptroller Frederick, and before its entrance was gathered a group of armed men.

"The home of the old Red Fox," muttered Ham.

"Careful," cautioned Fortune in a whisper. "Call no man out of his name."

They were not long past this tower, traveling always south, and once again among ruins and a wilderness of trees and creepers, when they heard the clatter of horses behind them. Giving a half of the road, they made way for six or eight mounted officers of the army of the Directorate.

As they passed, this group stared with all their eyes at Fortune and his servant, huddled together on the wearied horse. Several apparently recognized the identity of the young hero of the wall, but another, a dapper, black-haired man who wore the red feather of a captain, laughed mockingly. Leaning toward his companion, he made a remark, and then both looked over their shoulders and laughed.

FORTUNE, in the act of returning the careless salutes of the group, stiffened in his saddle and felt his face burn red. Impulsively he spurred at the tired horse, as if to ride forward and resent the jeer. But Ham's weary steed only stumbled and almost pitched them to the stones.

Before the horse had recovered, the group had gone out of reach.

"Ham," cried Fortune, unreasonably venting his injured feeling on the servant, "get down. It is not fitting you should ride behind me, and—and—by the torch, no man shall laugh at me again!"

Ham slipped obediently to his feet. His hand on Fortune's stirrup, he plodded beside the weary horse.

Now that sword blade of a tower that had beckoned them from the hill came into sight again and began to dominate the ragged horizon of ruined city and encroaching wilderness. Its western walls burned reddish gold with the evening light, and the eye, measuring its slender elegance, was held entranced alike by line and color.

It seemed to pierce the very secret of the greenish evening skies, and from its

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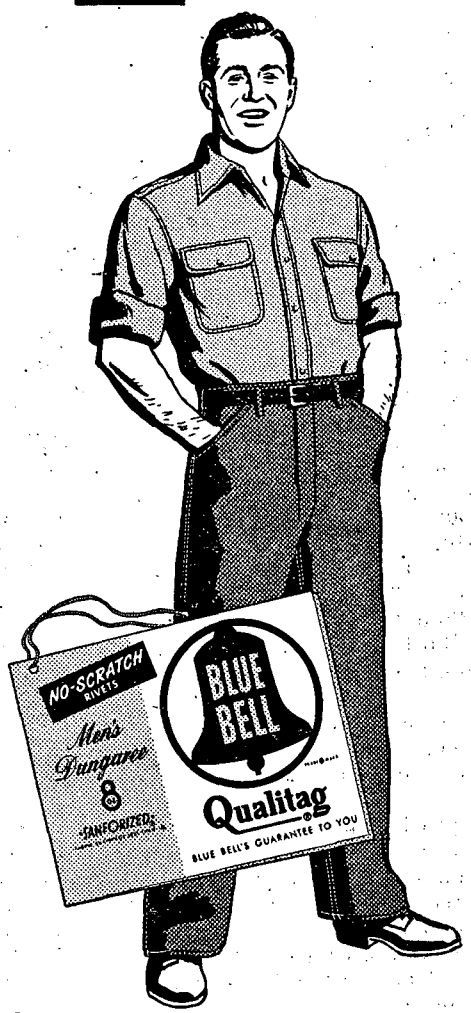

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top, just below the topmost of the mounting spires, rose a long serpent of smoke that shone like gold against the clear green. Always while the Great Towerman ruled Manhattan, that plume of smoke curled upward in triumph.

But down along the Broad Way or Towerman's Road the evening shadows were blue and becoming denser. Ruined walls leaned threateningly against them, and the rubbish heaps made the travel slow.

With a warning shout a servant in livery of flaming red darted past and waved them to one side. Behind this runner, at a stiff trot, came others, bearing a curtained litter.

It happened that just here one of the fallen walls had made the way narrow. Fortune on his horse was forced hard against an old wall while the running men slowed to pick their road past him.

The litter brushed close against the young petty-captain and as he stared the curtain was pushed aside and a woman's face, pale in the twilight, peered at him.

Fortune stared a moment into eyes black as midnight. He had time to note the wisp of hair of a rich dull red that coiled about the pale cheek; then the curtain was closed with an impatient twitch even as his hand was raised in courteous salute.

Just beyond them the litter was stopped a moment. One of its attendant group of servants in red came running back.

The man bared his head civilly before Fortune. "Your pardon, captain," he panted, "the lady desires to know your name and post."

"Fortune, the petty-captain of the great wall," said the young man proudly. "And tell me who—" He broke off his sentence and added angrily, "Hang the rascal, he's impudent!" For the servant, disregarding his question, had pushed forward again at a run.

"Why ask?" growled Ham excitedly. "By all the gods, the answer's plain enough. Who could it be than Alda, the daughter of Wolff himself! Those rascals wear Wolff's coat."

"Alda!" Fortune echoed. He was surprised and flattered immensely. His own recollection of Alda, seen only from a humble distance, verified Ham's guess. He had scarcely reached the city, and a great lady had stopped to learn his name—the most high-born of all the island women had noticed him!

"What did I tell you?" crowed Ham. "The great women are smiling already. Ho, when I find that maid you'll be picking and choosing too!"

"Perhaps," said Fortune, "some day." Then he sighed unexpectedly. "There is another woman I choose first," he went on. "Ham, we'll find her again, to-morrow or next day—as quickly as I can get free. You remember?"

"The woman of the isle?" Ham exclaimed incredulously. "Will you never stop talking of her!"

"Never until she's mine," Fortune exclaimed. "And, Ham, I'll make her mine—I've earned that much reward already."

CHAPTER II

FORTUNE MAKES AN ENEMY

PETTY-CAPTAIN FORTUNE had no friends of his own rank who shared his secrets. During his year of service he had avoided entangling alliances among the officers of the wall, heeding the advice of Karl the Strong, who had told his son, "If you would ride far, ride single."

When he was attracted to a man, Fortune, following his ambitious policy, questioned, "Is he greater than I? Can he help me to rise?" Thus far none had offered who fitted his needs.

But because a man must confide in someone or something, Fortune shared most of his secrets with Ham.

Ham knew all about the woman of the isle. Fortune's chance meeting with this woman had occurred more than a year before, yet still the young captain talked of her! And now he proposed to find her again. Ham rubbed his snub nose hard, and considered. Well, the errand promised adventures, and he was content!

The stumbling horse brought them to a considerable, open space in the ruins. They faced a vast building of gray stone, its lofty cornices still colored by the dying sun, but the greater part of its bulk already merging into the cold shadows of night.

The building was square of angle, and its three wings rose like gigantic granite cliffs. Its center was pierced by an arch about which burned some torches where men came and went. Some of the lower windows were alight, but in the higher levels they showed the sightless eyes of decay.

Seemingly this structure towered into the evening clouds. Of those buildings of the ancient city about which we know it was the most imposing. Until a time that

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is clouded in ignorance this had been the seat of government of New York as it was to-day the seat of authority in Manhattan.

Along the noble though broken façade, half obliterated by the creepers which clung all about it, deep in the old stone was cut an inscription that told the history of the ancient city—had there been men capable of reading it. What glories that old carving revealed we can only guess, for before men were again able to understand, it was wrecked and the secret is lost to posterity.

Only its name survives in the few preserved remnants of ancient writing. It was called Municipal Building.

The space all before the building was bare and paved. Here the series of shocks that attended the Great Catastrophe seemed to have levelled everything into shapeless mounds of ruins over which the strangling jungle spread its tentacles.

This was the heart of the city and the heart of the island, the seat of authority, and the offices of the Directorate of the Tower People. It was here that Fortune was to report to Wenn, commander of the army.

The Great Hall was forbidding enough in the half light, and seemed to offer a cold welcome, but in its own rude time it was the symbol of power and solidity just as Wolff's Tower was the climax of elegant luxury.

There was an armed guard on duty at the arched way where Fortune applied for admission. On giving his name, rank, and message an escort was furnished to take him to Wenn, and Ham was left to share his waiting with the worn-out horse.

Wenn, the commander, sat in a cold, bare room. Except for several pale-faced clerks—men who wore the brass bracelet of the Folk—he was alone.

Fortune knew well that short, sturdy figure and bullet head of close-cropped hair. Wenn's face was scarred and cut up with deeply graved lines. His eyes were tiny, but very sharp, and his white mustache bristled.

"You are late, captain," he greeted, returning Fortune's stiff salute.

"I was halted on the way, sir, first by the Comptroller Frederick—"

"Ah!" The commander's sharp eyes seemed to bore the young man for secrets.

"And again by some dogs of road-menders who had blocked our way," Fortune went on.

"The Towerman has asked about you," grumbled Wenn, biting at his ragged mustache. "I would give much to hear your report, but Wolff's order—he sat a full hour later to-day, expecting you—then he went to his tower, complaining. Come, we'd better not waste time!"

As they hastened out to their horses the commander gave an admiring glance at the young man who towered above him.

"You fought a good fight," he growled, "and I'd give ten years to hear your story—particularly that part about Engard, but the Towerman's orders are to bring it first to him. And so Frederick met you? Did the Red Fox ask questions?"

"He *asked* them," said Fortune significantly.

Wenn chuckled, but when he spoke his voice was sober. "If I knew what to advise you, I would do it for the sake of your father," he said confidentially. "There is rottenness in this affair. I would have smelled it out, but no! Wolff has taken the thing out of my hands. Men would think he could not trust me! But he assures me that is not his reason. Well, tell your story, captain, and be particular; especially give him all he wants to know about Engard."

"Why doesn't he ask Engard?" It was not Fortune's place to question, but he was curious to know if Wenn had any news of Engard's death, as Frederick had reported.

The commander shrugged. "It is out of my hands—and here we are!"

As he spoke they were challenged by the guard that patrolled Wolff's tower. The lower floors of the beautiful structure were glowing with yellow light, but above, like all these partially ruined towers, this was dark. So high was it that a man standing close, no matter how far he tipped back his head, could not see the crowning pinnacles because of the perspective of the lower walls.

TO WHAT enterprise of the ancient world that lovely structure had been dedicated we can only guess. Its ruins have long vanished, even its site has become a matter of dispute. We know it to have been the most beautiful thing of an old civilization, a cathedral tower that reared its glittering front high above any of those clifflike walls of the old days, a landmark to mariners, and a guide to those who travelled the land for many miles about.

Its height is almost beyond present belief, yet discounting the exaggeration of later enthusiasts and relying upon the

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earliest records, we can believe it to have reached a hundred and fifty floors.

Through imposing doors, arched above by carved stone of delicate and airy tracery, Fortune and Wenn entered directly a lofty hall somewhat shabby now, but still bearing traces of former splendor. The walls were of a golden-hued marble, and graceful, pointed arches carried these into its domed ceiling finished in a mosaic of greenish tinge. Worn though it was, all this finery of gilding and color, from floor to ceiling, produced a glow of elegance and richness beyond description.

A stair of noble proportion rose from the farther end of this hall to a handsome doorway, and a beautiful balcony commended a partial view of its splendors from a distance half its height.

These walls were hung with flags of the Tower People, and the pennons of the various High-born. A great number of wicks that floated in gold and silver dishes filled with oil made the hall bright, and men in armor and men wearing brightly colored costumes, together with numerous servants in the red garb of Wolff's household, completed a brilliant picture.

At their entry the general attention was focussed on Fortune. The petty-captain was still covered with the mire of the road and his left boot gaped open where the road-mender's ax had slit it. He walked stiffly, for he was very weary with long riding.

But his name and description seemed to have preceded him. After a momentary silence of recognition men began talking in low voices, and the young captain flushed with the unpleasant knowledge that he was the subject of remarks he could not distinguish.

Almost directly Wenn was summoned to the presence of the Towerman, and Fortune was left alone and a little ill at ease. For all his high chin and flashing eye he was aware of the mud that splattered him and the dirt and traces of blood on his hands and face; doubly aware of it because the men all about him were meticulously clean and curled and perfumed and gayly dressed.

"And so that is Captain Fortune of the North Wall?"

The words were spoken distinctly enough to reach the young man's ear. He wheeled about to find the speaker that same captain who had laughed when he saw Fortune and Ham sharing one horse on the Towerman's Road. He was a handsome figure of a soldier, with black and slightly curling hair, and a short-pointed beard and upturned mustaches. His glistening helmet boasted the long red feather of a senior captaincy, and his chain mail was partially concealed by a cape of flaming red that was embroidered with a design in gold thread.

Fortune shifted his weight uneasily, stifling his impulse to resent the slight of their recent meeting. This was no place to quarrel, nor would he, he determined, quarrel with any man until he knew his rank and influence.

He bit his lip and pretended to ignore the other's voice, but that was difficult, for several men with the stranger were staring openly. The little group moved closer to Fortune with an evident purpose.

"They say that out there on the wall," the speaker continued, addressing his friends, but evidently for Fortune's benefit, "men grow wild like the Wild Folk they fight with. Now that I've seen this hero of the wall I can well believe it. Would you imagine, I passed him and his man on the Towerman's Road, riding together on one horse? And by the Torch, I could not guess which was master and which man! They all grow alike when they're wild—"

The speaker laughed loudly, and his friends joined him.

THEY had scarcely begun their laugh when Fortune wheeled on them. In vain he had bit his lip and clenched his fists, hoping for self-control. His face was red and his eyes glowed angrily. The laughers became very quiet.

"You, sir," stuttered Fortune, "you find me—very—amusing?"

"Oh, all wild men are droll," shrugged the other, smiling, but keeping a sharp eye on Fortune's movement.

Fortune half raised his hand, intending to strike the smiling man in the mouth. But one of his companions interposed hastily, "Careful, captain. Not here, not here! Just a hint of a quarrel, and Wolff will break us all. Remember the order!"

Fortune knew well the rigid order forbidding brawls among officers, and he knew the harsh punishment that enforced it, but he went on in a low voice that trembled with anger, "You find me droll, do you? Let me tell you how droll I find you, you soft, curled and beperfumed tailor's dummy in soldier's clothes, you—"

"Ah, you have insulted me," said the other, with an impudent satisfaction.

"Yes, if such a thing is possible—"

"You will pay for it."

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"And who are you, if you please?"

"I am LeRoy, captain in Wolff's guard. You'll find me quite your equal in all things, captain." LeRoy smiled significantly and let his hand touch his sword-hilt.

"I am on Wolff's business," declared Fortune stiffly. "Until my errand is done I can do nothing. But after that!"

"Oh, I can wait, if I must," sighed the other, with mock resignation. "But it is very annoying. Still, from a wild man we must not expect everything—not even manners."

"Damn your impudence!" snarled Fortune, forgetting everything in his anger. "Now, then; wherever you please!"

"This way, quickly," said LeRoy, and the friends with him stepped beside Fortune and began to hustle him toward one of the exits from the hall.

"Captain Fortune!"

One of Wolff's attendants bawled the name into the hall.

"Captain Fortune, the Towerman awaits you."

Fortune whirled about. "Coming!" he cried.

"Plague!" snapped LeRoy. "Too late—"

"Not too late for you to escape me, however," warned Fortune.

"Whenever you please, then."

"Directly I leave Wolff. You will wait?"

"Delighted, my wild hero." LeRoy bowed sarcastically. Fortune's hand again twitched to strike him, but instead he tore himself from his mocker and hurried to join the herald who still shouted his summons.

Just outside the door that topped the grand stairway and led to the Towerman's hall of reception they were halted again by an attendant. "A moment, please," this attendant murmured with the condescension of servants who stand close to the great. "Alda, the High-born, has entered. I do not think you will wait long."

Waiting, Fortune had time to collect himself and put aside the anger that had whitened his face and widened his eyes.

"A fine thing you have done," his more cautious self whispered. "Engaged for sword-play against a fellow officer. If you are caught! Well, you wished for a friend in Wolff's guard; it seems you have found an enemy!"

He saw, too, that the quarrel had been forced upon him with deliberate intention. Normally shrewd, he suspected that there was a hidden motive back of this—and a hidden hand that moved LeRoy.

But a few hours ago his life was in danger from the road-menders. Now he faced a duel. There was a consistency about these adventures, and the object of them seemed to be his destruction.

And yet, reviewing the recent quarrel, he saw no other way out of it beside resentment of the insult.

The great door suddenly opened and the crimson curtains inside the door swept apart.

"Come, captain," whispered the attendant at his elbow.

Fortune stepped across the threshold, blinking at the bright lights within, and found himself facing Wolff.

WOLFF, the Great Towerman, by God's Grace Hereditary Dictator of the Common Weal; Magistrate and Administrator; Patron and Protector of the Folk; President of the Common Welfare and Defender of the Right; by popular will head of the Tower People of Manhattan—Wolff, we say, was in fine humor.

The last of the line of Wolff which had ruled the island for more than a century was a man of fifty-five-or-six years, in appearance a weakling. Disease had sapped his strength and left his skin with an unhealthy, yellow tinge. His hair was still jet black and he wore it in curling ringlets with a pointed beard.

When Fortune entered the hall of reception, Wolff was talking vivaciously in his thin and slightly cracked voice to Wenn, his daughter Alda, and a half dozen officers of his household he had gathered about the great chair where he sat on a slightly raised platform. He held at arm's length a statuette cast in solid gold and appeared to be delivering a lecture on its merits.

Watching this man, who wore the Towerman's robe of yellow, though he acknowledged him head of all government and was inwardly anxious to win his approbation, Fortune could not help a certain feeling of good-natured contempt—the contempt of a strong and young man for one who is weak. After all, he thought, the Great Towerman is not so terrifying, even though he is mighty.

"That Kinst has done his work well—he has carried out my inspiration marvelously," the Towerman was saying. "You see? You recognize it, do you not?"

"Marvelous!" murmured several men. "Extraordinary!" "The work of a genius!"

One, bolder than the rest, guessed, "It is the Great Woman, the ruined statue of the isle restored!"

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"Good," laughed the Towerman, excited as a boy. "Ah, you all recognize it, eh? The inspiration came to me in a dream—in a vision I saw it all complete, the missing arm restored, the wrecked figure with its almost obliterated face rounded out again, and glowing as with life. The gods gave me the vision to grasp the secret of the ancients. See, in her right arm she holds aloft the sword, the symbol of power—"

"The sword!" Wenn exclaimed bluntly. "I thought it was a torch she bore?"

Wolff frowned, and all except Wenn, always confident of favor, held their breath.

"The sword!" Wolff cried angrily. "You see it, do you not?"

"But the students of old days have said—all the Folk say, too—"

"The Folk? The Folk?" Wolff stormed shrilly. "Are we then to take lessons from the Folk? Am I no wiser than the Folk? I tell you I have studied that statue of the Great Woman; she fascinates me—and it has been given to me to see her in a dream as she was in her glory, bearing aloft the sword, symbol of power, and wearing the crown of authority. See, under her left arm she clutches the tablet of the laws. Note the face, stern, terrible, a face to inspire awe and obedience to the High-born. Do you doubt my ability to interpret this ruin? Perhaps, commander, you can do better?"

"I said only what all men say about the Great Woman," Wenn muttered uneasily. "I am no critic, great sir. I am a soldier—"

"Quite so, commander, and stick to your trade then."

There was a subdued snicker from Wolff's admirers. Wenn chewed at his mustache but he still muttered to himself, "Well, a fine time you'll have making the Folk believe in that statue."

"I dare say," mocked the Towerman, "you are a believer, too, in the old saw that the Torch will burn again, eh, commander?"

"Great sir, I believe only what I see," muttered Wenn. "I am no critic. If you say it is the sword I am content."

"With my own hands I made the model," Wolff explained to his admirers. "I molded it from the clay and personally told this fellow Kinst how to complete my inspiration. Ah, if the business of government were not so exacting! If I were not Towerman! Sometimes I wish I could have been born among the Folk and had spent my life in the studio, making things with my hands."

"The world must lose its greatest artist to win its greatest ruler," declared the man who had guessed the identity of Wolff's creation.

The others sighed their concurrence.

"Before I die," Wolff exclaimed eagerly, "it is my plan to restore that colossal statue on the isle. This shall be our model. The whole world will see and applaud. Soon I intend putting the idea into a poem—perhaps a hymn, a hymn for all the Folk to sing in praise of my idea—"

At this moment Wolff's wandering eye caught sight of Fortune, standing alone at the rear of the chamber. "Who is it?" he asked querulously. An attendant whispered to him. "Ah, yes," he sighed, "affairs of government again. Come forward, Captain Fortune. This, gentlemen, is Captain Fortune; you have heard of him, eh? Fortune of the wall, the man who held back the Wild Folk."

The Towerman mused a moment. "Fortune," he went on, "a curious name—I am sure you are my good Fortune!"

The pun was duly applauded, and the Towerman smiled. Fortune's reception began auspiciously.

"Well, sir," said Wolff, "tell us of that great battle. Come, captain!"

Fortune's gaze had strayed to Alda, the High-born, verifying Ham's information that this was the woman in the litter who had sent to ask his name.

ALDA had seated herself near her father and her shining black eyes examined Fortune with lively interest and evident approval. A lithe, sinuous woman, her strange beauty was enhanced by the robe she wore, a robe the color of sea water when the sun strikes through, very simply made and without any ornament except the great ruby that glowed at her breast.

Her skin was white and her cheeks had no color, but her lips were full and red as a poppy. Her hair of mahogany red was not dressed in the fashion, but streamed loose below a gold ornament that bound it at her neck.

Fortune bowed in his best manner—the cadets' school taught young officers a little beside tactics, and a higher color came into his smooth cheeks at the prominence of his position.

"Highest-born," he began hesitantly. "It is a simple story and not very fine for ladies' ears. The Wild Folk attacked the great wall at my tower which is at the end of the Swift Ditch where it enters

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North River. Unfortunately a half of our command had been withdrawn, but spies had warned us of the attack and when they came we did our best.

"Now where the Ditch flows its swiftest, that is, by my tower, men have always paid less heed to a strong wall, depending on the water for their safety. But the Wild Folk were cunning.

"Often they have tried to cross in fleets of their little boats, but the current is too strong for them. This time the attack began about dawn, and, sir, the devils had stretched ropes of hide across the stream, a dozen of them! Along these the boats came by scores, the men in them laying hold of the ropes and pulling themselves across the current.

"And at the same time, from the other shore, more of them lay under cover and filled the air with arrows so that it was all a man's life was worth to show his head.

"Fully half a hundred of their warriors were landed before we knew it.

"From the wall we crawled out, keeping low and behind the rocks and cover, to cut their cables. There was hot fighting there beside the water and the dead and wounded mostly were swept away by the Swift Ditch, both our men and theirs.

"My men tried to break and run when the thing was hottest, but I drove them into it though they died like flies in a frost. One after another we cut their cables and a great fleet of their little boats swept down the ditch, crashing together and spilling their fighting men into the current.

"But others had landed and some found ways to reach the summit of the wall itself. I had left men behind me to attend to this, but to keep them heartened I had to go often among them. Between that and the fighting beside the water, we spent a long and busy morning, for the Wild Folk came in hundreds.

"Then finally, toward noon, we beat them off, and they went away. So we saved what wounded men we could and rested ourselves. They did not come again."

"And that is the story?" said Wolff.

"Highest-born, that is the story," Fortune replied.

"You say very little about yourself, captain!"

Fortune flushed again. "I did my best," he admitted. "So did we all. The men are heroes, all of them, and I speak particularly for the bound-man Ham who attends me. Six times he saved my life that morning."

"I will not forget," Wolff acknowledged. "Nor will I forget your service, captain. Now there is another thing—" Wolff stopped and made a significant motion of his hand. The men who had gathered to listen bowed and left the room. Only Wenn and Alda remained.

"You, commander," Wolff directed, "wait farther off. I will talk to the young captain alone."

Wenn grumbled to himself as he moved out of hearing.

"Come closer," the Towerman beckoned. Fortune advanced until he stood close to Wolff's seat.

"About Engard, your over-captain, eh, what about him?" asked Wolff eagerly.

"He withdrew a good half of our men, sir, the night before the attack. He told me the men were wanted elsewhere, though even then he had been warned by our spies that the Wild Folk were coming."

"Yes, yes," Wolff nodded, "but about a certain message Engard received. You know about that?"

"I saw a message that came to Engard an hour before he left the tower," Fortune admitted.

"And the seal, you saw the seal? Come, young captain, give me the story. You have not told it elsewhere, eh?"

"I thought it best to save it for your ear alone," said Fortune hopefully.

"Good. Yes, that is best. Well, get to it—"

"I held the message in my hands and examined its seal. The messenger brought it to me when he sought Engard. The wax had been impressed with a device—"

"Yes; what device?"

"A coiled snake, great sir—a snake coiled and about to strike."

Fortune watched the Towerman's face for some change of expression, some show of surprise or anger that would give him a clue to follow. Instead he saw only puzzlement.

"A snake! You are certain it was a snake?"

"As certain as I am of standing before you."

"I know of no such device," puzzled Wolff. "I had thought it would be something else. Well, you saw it—there's no getting behind that. Now, captain, by my order, keep this secret to yourself. You understand?"

Fortune nodded.

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"DOUBTLESS this has a meaning," Wolff continued, rather thinking aloud than addressing Fortune. "All things have a meaning, when one has the key to knowledge. Oh, yes, another thing—I learn, that Frederick, the comptroller, stopped you on your way."

"He did, great sir."

"And questioned you about this seal?"

"He did."

"But you kept it secret?" Again Fortune nodded. "He was angry, eh?" Wolff demanded eagerly.

"No," said Fortune truthfully, "he did not appear so. He advised me only to conceal nothing from you." Then the young man added audaciously, "He said also that you would reward such devotion, if you knew."

"I have already promised that," Wolff declared with a certain dignity. "Look you, Fortune, Wenn shall make you an over-captain to-night by my order—you hear me, commander?"

"I hear," rumbled Wenn, drawing closer. "I will have the order written at once."

"And find the captain a new post—a softer bed for a time; he has earned that," Wolff continued. "Let him command in the guard of the Under City, where he can be near me."

"Highest-born," Fortune stammered, happily, "I—I am grateful—I give you my humble thanks!"

"Perhaps you wish still more?" quizzed Wolff, smiling faintly.

"Only a trifle, Highest-born, just—"

"What, you do! Well, well, go on—"

"Five days' leave of absence from duty?" Fortune questioned eagerly.

"Aha! Now I see, there's a woman at the bottom of this, eh, Wenn, eh?"

"There's always a woman, damn them!" Wenn growled. "They play the devil with discipline—"

"There is a woman, eh, captain, there is?" Wolff insisted.

Fortune reddened, and especially because he found that Alda was watching him intently from the shadow.

"You admit it!" the Towerman crowed. "Well, captain, ask your commander about that. I agree. And my thanks to you and your men. Wenn, see that those men of the wall are thanked in my name. And that is all, I think."

Fortune's quick eye noted that Alda had already risen and was leaving the chamber by a rear door. With Wenn, he bowed ceremoniously to the Towerman, and the attendant who had been waiting for that signal came forward now to escort them.

"Report to me in the morning, captain—and my best wishes and congratulations on your advance," growled Wenn when they again stood outside the great door.

Fortune thanked the commander absently. He remembered, abruptly, that somewhere near LeRoy was waiting with the intention of completing their quarrel. The remembrance was a fine check to his elation. Though he was physically courageous, Fortune did not see anything to be gained by risking his good luck again in that eventful day.

He sent a servant to find Ham, who had been left to wait at the entrance to Wolff's tower. While he hesitated, expecting his man and glancing from the balcony among the crowd below to find LeRoy, he became aware that a woman had stopped beside him.

She was a black-haired, dark-skinned woman who wore a gray cape that covered her. She moved silently as a shadow.

Her lips twisted and Fortune caught his own name.

"Yes, what is it? I do not hear you."

The woman spoke again, a little more audibly, drawing him into the shadow of a curtain before she gave her message.

"A lady wishes to talk with you—follow me."

"But I can't," Fortune exclaimed impatiently. "There is another matter—say to her I am honored, and later—"

"It is most urgent," the messenger insisted.

"Ask her pardon for me, a thousand times, but another affair—later I will be delighted—"

"The High-born bade you to follow me," this curious woman insisted.

"A plague! I—ah, Ham! Here I am."

Ham bustled forward with his tubby, waddling gait. "The gentlemen are waiting for you, they bade me tell you," he puffed.

"Good, I'm coming." To the gray little shadow of a messenger Fortune added, "You see, it is urgent. Later—" He hurried away with Ham, and the woman in the gray cape, silent as night in her movements began to follow them.

"They are in a court, behind the tower," Ham whispered hoarsely. "This LeRoy says he will spit you with his sword. A fine mess we're in now!"

FORTUNE paid little attention to Ham's grumbling. Out of his conversation with the Towerman one fact overshadowed all

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others in interest—Wolff himself was in ignorance of the person who had conspired to let the Wild Folk invade the island. He was satisfied that Wolff had spoken truly when he declared that the seal with its device of a coiled serpent meant nothing to him. It had failed to verify whatever suspicion the Towerman had of the men about him.

And though he was hurrying to a duel that might easily mean his death, Fortune felt a pleasurable excitement. At last he was in the thick of things, an actor in a game where the stakes were high. This was what he had long hoped for.

To possess secrets of state; to share the confidence of the mighty and to be sent for by some mysterious woman, "Highborn," the messenger had said—what more could a young man of his time desire!

"This way," Ham directed.

They had quit Wolff's tower by a rear exit and were before a high wall with a heavy wooden door set in it. Ham rapped three times with his sword-hilt and the door was opened cautiously, revealing a small courtyard lighted by several torches.

The little court was overshadowed by ruinous walls and the black shells of once noble architecture. Fortune found himself nodding stiffly to Captain LeRoy and acknowledging the three men who accompanied him.

"Well, my wild man?" LeRoy greeted him.

"I am ready," Fortune answered curtly. The pair drew their swords without further ceremony and moved into the center of the circling torches. Ham, close to Fortune's side, whispered, "He's a bad one, this LeRoy. And he can handle a sword; few better! Press him fast and hard, wear him down, for he's soft, and that's in your favor."

Their sword-blades crossed and almost instantly Fortune's was countered so sharply that it flew from his hand. "I fear you are a little too much the wild man and a little too lacking in skill," taunted LeRoy.

Fortune saw that his opponent was playing with him. He was furiously angry. His eyes widened swiftly into a mad glare. Really he was more angry at himself for the slip that had disarmed him, and he resolved in his cold, calculating anger that LeRoy should pay for his humiliation.

Ham recovered the weapon and pressed it into his hand. Sparks flew from their scraping steel. Fortune pushed in furiously, aware now that he was out-matched by the other's skill, but trusting to strength and good luck to beat down his defense and escape the penalty of his rashness.

He noted that LeRoy had stopped smiling. He was breathing harder, and Fortune knew that his arm was making up in strength whatever it lacked in skill.

It was Fortune's advantage that the more furious his anger the cooler he became. It was his intention to kill LeRoy. He selected his opponent's most vulnerable spot, at the base of the neck, where a blade would not meet chain mail in its thrust.

A momentary flicker of LeRoy's blade, crossed with his, telegraphed to Fortune his opportunity. With all the skill and strength he had, he drove the point.

LeRoy's quickness was sufficient to defeat Fortune's purpose but not to keep the blade from slashing through his sword arm, below the sleeve of steel mail. The sword dropped from LeRoy's hands and he stood unsteadily, looking stupidly at his wound.

Blood was spouting from LeRoy's arm as he stumbled and dropped to the flagstones. He turned a white face on his companions. "Finish him," he rasped, "finish him! Remember our orders!"

Three swords already had flashed singing from their scabbards and Fortune wheeled to face the uneven attack. A great body, solid as a stone wall, was thrust against his back and with a hoarse shout, Ham, too, had joined the fight.

Scarcely had their blades clashed before there came an interruption. The heavy wooden door to the court was burst open and the place was filled with armed men. With them, flitting in the shadow, came the woman in the gray cloak.

It was her pointing finger that indicated Fortune and his man. Then, before a blow was struck, the combatants were separated.

"By Wolff's order," growled the captain of the tower guard.

"Now, we're in for it," Ham wailed. "We're done for this time, captain—"

But the woman in gray already had Fortune by the arm. "This way; follow me," she whispered. "And you may bring your man." To the captain of the guard the gray messenger merely nodded as she led the astounded pair away.

"And now where!" exclaimed Fortune.

Their chaperon merely repeated her former message: "I told you a certain lady wished to see you."

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"So it would seem!" Fortune gasped. Then he added in alarm. "But not this way—the guard will be looking for me. If I go back there now I'm caught!"

They were again beneath the tremendous wall of Wolff's Tower.

"No fear," said his guide. "The guard will not bother you again. LeRoy and his friends will do the paying."

"Who are you?"

"Nobody. Call me Trina; that is my name. I serve the lady who sent for you. Thank her for what she has done."

"Only one woman is great enough to stop the mouths of Wolff's guard," Fortune guessed. "So it must be—"

"Be still," cautioned Trina. "Let her tell her name."

THE GUARD at the door where they entered stepped aside at Trina's nod. The woman led them to a closed-in stairway of steel, and they climbed a breath-taking way. Crossing a dimly lit corridor they passed another guard and entered a small and barely furnished room.

"Let your man wait here," said Trina. She led Fortune through another door and into a second room, evidently another of the antechambers to greatness. Here there were some cushioned benches and a table that bore a large vase of colorful spring flowers.

"Wait," said Trina briefly. She pushed open still another door and disappeared a moment behind the curtain it disclosed. Then she beckoned Fortune and swept the curtain aside to admit him, and after that she vanished discreetly.

Fortune was astounded by the room, though not so greatly surprised at the personality of its occupant.

Its subdued and scattered lamps revealed an apartment truly magnificent, with tapestries covering its walls such as Fortune had never before seen, and elaborately carved furniture of hardwood. At one end, towering as high as the carved ceiling, was a mantel of stone, cut by cunning hands that were dust these many centuries, into a bewildering detail of figures and ornament.

The polished woods glowed in rich, warm tones; the tapestries, old as they must then have been, still lent a colorful illumination, and only in the rugs that covered the floor did the visitor discern anything of his own time, for these were of the coarser, common weave of his own day.

Alda, the High-born, for her own use, had the treasures of a remote antiquity, looted from the former occupants of that great tower and before their time looted again and again—who can say how often? —until their history stretched back to dim days unknown to us.

Wolff's daughter lay luxuriously along the cushions of a carved settee, raised above the general floor level. At Fortune's entrance she lifted herself by one supporting arm to stare a long time at the dusty young soldier in torn clothing who had removed his helmet and stared back a silent inquiry.

There was an odd, magnetic beauty in Alda's pale face with its crown of mahogany colored hair and full, red lips; about her lithe body displayed by the sea-green robe, and her fascinating white hands and arms. That beauty was heightened by the rich setting she had chosen to frame it and the cunning arrangement of lamps. No wonder Fortune stared rudely.

"You were long in coming, captain." Alda pouted. "I'm afraid you come unwillingly."

"I had already given my word to be elsewhere—"

"Yes, yes, an affair of honor! Well, you are lucky to stand here and not be lying dead by LeRoy's hand—"

Fortune stiffened angrily, and Alda laughed.

"Or be locked up somewhere for brawling," she amended.

"Lady, I am grateful," Fortune protested vehemently, but she interrupted him.

"Let that go. I didn't have you brought here to thank me. You will have other chances to do that. No, I have asked you here to offer—but wait, captain, you are tired and hungry! On that table find meat and fruit and wine. Pour me that glass full."

Fortune brought a filled glass, his hostess touched it with her lips, and passed it back for him to drink. This complimentary custom was common enough among the Tower People, but the look which Alda gave him as he finished the glass, a look that seemed to dare hint things her lips could not say, was a far more dangerous intoxicant than the wine.

"Bring those dishes here beside me and let us talk while you refresh yourself," she directed.

Seated so dangerously close, Fortune was keenly aware that even the High-born was a woman, with all a woman's dangerous charms. He began to forget that caution he had made his policy.

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"Fortune," said Alda abruptly, "I sent for you because—I—I wish to be your friend—and—I wish you to be mine. Though I've seen you but once, I trust you. Will you trust me—will you promise your friendship?"

"I?" Fortune stuttered in amazement. "I your friend? Why, I don't dare—I don't presume to call myself—that. Your servant—your slave, yes, but—"

"You would refuse!" Alda reproached him, her eyes widening like those of a child rebuffed. "Do you think, then, that I have so many friends? Let me tell you, Fortune, I have none—no man in whom I can trust. If I were of the folk I do not think all men would shun me—I am not so bad as that, eh?"

Fortune, inarticulate, shook his head vigorously.

"Then be my friend—my true friend. Give me your promise," Alda pleaded, leaning closer toward the enraptured young man, wooing him with her brilliant black eyes.

"I am—I am! By the torch, always I will be your friend in everything!" Fortune gasped earnestly.

"Good! I know I can count on your word." Alda held out her hand, white and cool, and laid it in Fortune's open palm. The young soldier kissed the slim fingers awkwardly, but with sufficient warmth to cause their hasty withdrawal. Alda smiled.

"My good friend," she began musically, her shoulder touching Fortune's, "you have proved yourself brave and you have proved yourself discreet, too. I am going to give you my confidence, something no man—or woman—ever shared. But first put your hand in mine, Fortune, and swear that you will always keep this secret."

FORTUNE did as he was told. "Now swear—" Alda began, then stopped. Her silence was alarming in its suddenness. Following her gaze, Fortune saw that it was centered on his hand, on the gold ring he wore, the ring he had taken from the supposed road-mender.

"You dare to come to me, wearing that ring!" In Alda's tone there was something of the warning snarl of the tigress about to spring; the hiss of the poisonous snake about to strike.

"That ring? It is not mine," stammered Fortune. "I found it. Listen." Briefly he told her of the fight on the road.

"That is true?" said Alda sharply, when he had finished. "Of course it is; I can see it in your eyes," she assured him. "Then, my friend, it is time you were warned.

"Fortune, we stand in peril, you and I together. I am in danger because I will not do a certain thing; you, because you know too much already and you have crossed the path of a dangerous man."

"Who?"

"This morning you were stopped by Frederick, on your way to report Engard's treachery?"

"Yes, is he—"

"And you would not make him a certain promise," Alda swept on. "I know about that. And I know something more, though, mind you, nobody has told me whose seal or what seal was on that message to Engard which nearly cost you the North Wall; I tell you from my own knowledge; it was an impress similar to that ring you wear."

"It was!" Fortune exclaimed, all his caution forgotten. "This is some kind of magic, then, if you were not told!"

"Only a woman's magic—the sort she is born with." Alda smiled. "And whose seal do you suppose that might be?"

"I don't know," Fortune confessed. "Even the Towerman—"

"No, he doesn't guess, yet. They are too clever for that. It is a certain great man—come closer beside me where we can whisper together. There, that's better! Listen, did you ever think who would take the rule after my father's death?"

"Who—why you, I suppose—no, I never thought."

"When ever did a woman succeed to the chair?"

"But it is hereditary—the law says that!"

"Because there has always been a strong man to take it," whispered Alda tensely. "But who am I? A woman!" She shrugged her shoulders with a bitter smile.

"But such a woman as you—why not?" Fortune exclaimed sincerely.

"You believe that could be?"

"I do."

"Ah, well, sometimes I think so, too, my dear friend. But there are others— Fortune, who, think you now, would be most ambitious to take over the office of Towerman if they could force an election from the Directorate? Who is most powerful—"

"I know, Frederick—"

"Hush," Alda cautioned him. "Leave the name unsaid. Yes, you are right. Let me tell you a great secret now That man already has tried to bring about his marriage to me—"

"To you!"

"Yes, urging it on my father as a nec-

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essary policy to unite support for my succession. My succession! What do you think I'd have to say if—*he*—held the reins!"

"And your father, the Towerman?"

"He has held off, playing with the idea, scheming and wondering what to do. If he could, he would make the succession secure for his line—that is his family duty. But he is weak, and—this other one, is powerful. Always he is at work. This affair of the wall—"

"Then it was he! The message came from him?"

"Who else?"

"But why?"

"I think I can tell you that. Some time back he has been urging a war, an invasion to the north, the reclamation of more of that land which the Folk believe was once theirs. For this he had two reasons; and the one he urged upon the Directorate was the Folk themselves. They have increased much in numbers and power in these last thirty years of peace. They are a menace—"

"THE FOLK a menace! The Folk?" exclaimed Fortune incredulously.

"Yes, the Folk. Remember this, they will always be a menace by their strength of numbers unless by constant wars we keep them thinned out, and content. That was the reason he urged on the Directorate, but the reason that urged him on was more selfish—his desire for military glory.

"That man is clever! He cares nothing at all for glory in itself, but he sees in it a means to prove his power to rule. He failed to win his point and bring about this war, and then—who else would hope for an invasion through the North Wall? He was bound to make an opportunity for himself and he was ready and waiting, with a large force, to conquer the invaders and prove himself a popular hero—only you and your men disappointed him."

"And that was why he cut our force in half—why he left us there to be murdered!" cried Fortune angrily.

Alda nodded. "Why not? Murdering men is nothing to his ambition. But remember, you fooled him, and you know too much. You stand in his way. Can you see that now? Those road-menders, this quarrel with LeRoy—all his doing."

"Of course! But what can I do?"

"Only this, night and day be careful! Never sleep without your man on guard. Never eat with strangers. Never drink except you know the well. Never go out alone; nor leave the open familiar streets, nor go among the Folk unarmed. Every moment be on your guard, and I, too, will watch over you, with all the power I can command."

"I am grateful to you!" vowed Fortune. "Already I owe you my safety—my life, too, in exchange for your favor. What can I do to prove my gratitude?"

"At present, nothing. Some day, perhaps, I shall need you badly. I have my own plans and my own ways of bringing them about, Fortune. When the time comes, you shall know them all. But remember your vow—you are my friend. Be that truly and I—I promise you it will lead to rewards—there are things I can do—I can find ways to thank you. You will remember that promise?"

"I am your slave," vowed Fortune. "Let me prove it!"

"Then be on your guard—nothing more now. Wait, though—" Alda's face hardened and her eyes glittered coldly. "There was some talk of another woman?" she questioned imperiously.

In spite of himself Fortune colored. "Only a fancy," he protested, "just a girl of the Folk."

"You promise that?"

"I give you my word."

"I will accept no divided allegiance, my friend."

"My word is pledged. I tell you she is only a fancy—"

Alda smiled again, kindly. "Then go, go and find her—since it amuses you." She dismissed him. "I hope I am too great to be jealous of such a woman."

Again Fortune found himself kissing her hand with unnecessary warmth.

"You will not forget me?" Alda insisted. "No? Good, you'll find I can reward you—my true friend."

Fortune had no definite recollection of leaving the tower nor of going with Ham to his barracks in the Great Hall. His brain was stupefied with the crowded events of the most unusual day of his adventurous life.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT WOMAN'S ISLE

IN SPITE OF all the excitement of a day that had twice put him in jeopardy of life; brought him promotion and favor, and the sworn friendship of a most powerful woman, Fortune slept serenely. Heeding Alda's warning, he left Ham to guard his door and it was typical of Ham

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that though he grumbled that his eyes could no longer keep open, he did not sleep a wink until his master was about again in the morning.

Before he left Ham to answer a summons from Wenn, Fortune issued the day's orders. "You may sleep as long as you please," he declared, "but see to it that by sunset you have a small boat with a sail provisioned and ready for us at the southern tip of the island, just beyond the swamps. Let there be enough for several days, for we are going to the Isle of the Great Woman."

"Gods be good to us," sighed Ham, rubbing his tired eyes. "Are not the smiles of one woman enough?"

"Ham," Fortune raged, "I shall have to cut out that tongue of yours after all! It seems you cannot keep it still—"

"I say no more," said Ham, "only—"

"Give me your tongue!" cried Fortune, snatching at his sheath knife.

Ham shouted in terror, then grinned sheepishly as his master laughed. "But remember," Fortune warned him, "I am now an over-captain, and if you displease me I will have you killed. You great fool, do you think I will give up the plan I've cherished more than a year because another woman smiled at me? This is the reward I have chosen, and I am going to take it. Since that day I landed on the isle by accident and saw the girl, I've planned to own her. Who are you to stop me?"

"Only a sleepy old watch-dog," Ham murmured, and stretching himself on the cold stone floor drifted into dreams almost instantly.

Wenn greeted Fortune with news. "Engard, your over-captain, is dead," he announced.

"Dead! How—"

"A runner came in from the wall early this morning. Engard was slain—just outside your tower—probably the work of the Wild Folk, but no man witnessed it. Well, there will be changes now along the wall."

Fortune nodded dumbly. His mind whirled with the news. Frederick was a true prophet—or was it a prophecy? Did not Frederick *know?* His own intuitions and Alda's frank warning made him distinctly uneasy. He was playing with fire.

"Your rank has been published to the army, over-captain," Wenn went on abruptly. "At Wolff's desire I am placing you in charge of Cantonment Six of the Under City. It is a soft bed, my friend. Also, you are granted seven days' leave beginning with sunset, but first I order you to visit your new post. Captain Ransome, who has been transferred, will show you."

Except for the little he had seen of the Under City during his training in the cadets' school, Fortune was ignorant of the life of the Folk. Marching beside Ransome, at the head of an escort of a half dozen of the police guard, he listened with interest to his guide's instructions.

They passed through numerous corridors of the Great Hall, corridors that still held the dread cold of winter though the day was warm outside. They descended many stairs and came at last to a guarded door that was opened to them.

With the opening of this door a rush of air fanned their faces and Fortune sniffed the never-to-be-forgotten taint of the subterranean cantonments where the Folk lived—the Under City of Manhattan.

To men of that day this amazingly complex labyrinth of tunnels that extended in every direction beneath the surface of the island was one of the unfathomed riddles of the old civilization.

Despite lack of authoritative information—for learning was the property of but a handful—they could guess that those towering structures of stone and broken and twisted steel that thrust their heads high above the swamp growth along the eastern river's edge and flung their twining banners of vine and creeper to the winds, had once been bridges—marvelous spans that had traced a solid way to the opposite shore.

So, too, it was plain that the mutilated columns and arches placed here and there about the ruins must have commemorated ideals of the ancients just as did that mysterious Great Woman of the Isle which had intrigued Wolff's fancy.

But these tunnels—these endless, black bores that led everywhere and nowhere, without any semblance of order or plan—while they used them, the dwellers of Manhattan in 1989, Folk and Tower People alike, had no clue to their secret.

Modern investigation has explained them to us. They were the trainways of the ancients. Before the Great Catastrophe trains had moved on the surface, on elevated structures and under the earth, so dense had the population of old New York become. It is difficult now to conceive such a condition in city life. The modern who contemplates that dim age can only marvel that men ever reached their destinations by such a clumsy method.

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And now, when the old civilization had passed as a candle flame is snuffed out, these old tunnels—in the ancient speech the subways—were the dwelling place of the Folk, the unhappy slaves of Manhattan.

THEY passed into a wide, low gallery, lighted by numerous lamps. Along its sides stood looms where men and women were patiently bent, twining bright-colored threads into rugs and hangings. Mostly these weavers were women, and the men did the more menial work of carrying wool to the distaffs and making and supplying yarns.

A long tunnel opened off the gallery and as they followed this they saw more galleries, branching at either side. Some were empty, others apparently used for living quarters of the Folk; in still others they saw the flames of forges where metal was wrought, or heard the industry of cabinet-makers and the various artisans who supplied the needs of a community only half civilized.

Everywhere there was industry, but except for the noise of tools or machinery, general silences. The Folk did little talking and that only in monotone. Silent industry was the order of this strange city beneath a city.

Occasional patrols of the police guard passed. Mostly these were soldiers disabled for more active fighting by wounds or age. "It's mighty different, let me tell you, in the labor cantonments," Ransome explained. "There you've got to have men who can use a sword or a club and use it fast and hard. Those are quarrelsome dogs, always rioting and killing, and they'll kill the High-born as cheerfully as they'll knife each other, give them the chance. If you ever command there you'll learn never to go about alone!

"But these artisans are tamed. They have soft work and they appreciate it. You don't catch them running risk of imprisonment in the Drains—not very often, anyway."

"I'm glad I have a guide." Fortune grinned. "I should think men would get lost in all these windings!"

"Ho, these are nothing! They say that almost the entire old system is blocked off now. Fancy what it must have been in the days of the ancients—before the Great Catastrophe, miles and miles and miles of it, winding in and out, back and forth, the whole area of the island. Even now men lose their way and—don't say I said it—but even to-day there are some forgotten tunnels that never were blocked off, so that sometimes some of the Folk disappear—"

"They run away?" asked Fortune.

"Usually that's it, though where they run to the gods only know! They must finally starve to death or die of the damp. Those old holes must be frightful, always caving in and filled with poisoned air that's lain there since the Catastrophe, I dare say."

"Strange that men ever dug all these holes," Fortune marveled. "At the school they told us it was here that every rank, high and low, sheltered that year of the Great Catastrophe, at least the few who were not killed. Can you imagine them, hiding underground, men and women mad with terror, dying like rats! And in these holes the new race was born—eh, Ransome, those must have been days!"

"Why bother one's head about those times?" Ransome scoffed. "Isn't it enough to worry a man in finding advancement, enough graft money to pay his debts and to keep jealous women from knifing him? Besides, here's Cantonment Six for you to think about. You're lucky, captain; you have only the gold workers and that trash to bother you."

"They're tame, eh?"

"They're lambs! Come, we'll hold morning court and you'll see."

In that Under City, the police accused, arrested, tried, and condemned the violators of the law. The two captains took seats on the platform devoted to justice and men of the guard ranged the day's catch of culprits before them.

There were only a half dozen, all men except one. She was a youngish woman with a certain poise and roundness of youth that slightly mitigated her pale, sallow skin, irregular features, and matted hair that hung about her face in untidy strings.

The eyes of this woman were red with crying and the same emotion had puffed her lips and reddened her nose, adding somewhat to her unloveliness, but it was apparent that with at least one man present, she found favor. These two kept close together in the herded group, her hand trembling on his arm while he whispered often to her and occasionally patted her shoulder awkwardly.

HE HAD the sallow skin of all the Folk, and heavy features of an aquiline cast, but there was something of quick in-

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telligence in his glance, a rather imposing breadth of brow and wide-set eyes, a firmness of the mouth and poise of the head which marked him superior to his loutish and soot-blackened fellow-prisoners.

"Here's distinguished company," was the cheerful greeting of the petty-captain who had active charge of the cantonment. "You see that little fellow, captain—he with the bushy, long hair? That's Kinst, the gold worker, and a favorite with Wolff, so I hear. He half killed an engraver—the fellow who lies on the stretcher over there. We'd have had murder here if the guard hadn't arrived on the second. Kinst was trying to brain him with a heavy metal saw."

"What did they fight about?" Ransome asked.

"Oh, a woman, of course—the one who stands with Kinst. Though why they should quarrel over *her!* Well, Kinst says this woman Anna is his sweetheart, and this engraver, Fay, has been trying to lure her away. Then last night they fought—that's about the size of it as well as I can get the story."

To Fortune, Ransome observed in an undertone, "See what it is to have a smart young fellow for your petty-captain! If I didn't know this gold worker was a favorite with Wolff I'd have gone ahead and had his hands cut off, or some silly thing. Now I am warned. I tell you, captain, you must keep your eyes open when you do justice!"

Ransome bent forward, frowning sternly upon his little court. "Kinst and the woman Anna, step out," he commanded. "And bring here that wounded man in the stretcher. Good, now let the hurt man make his complaint."

The wounded victim of the goldsmith's wrath muttered his story to a soldier, who repeated it to Ransome. "Now, Kinst, your story?"

The goldsmith stepped forward and faced the court with a certain confidence.

"The woman is mine, mine by her own choice," he declared, his tone respectful, but trembling with hidden emotion. "This man Fay has worked long beside me. I taught him all he knows. I did him many services, and in gratitude he tries to steal Anna! I wish I had killed him!"

"Be careful," frowned Ransome. "For such talk men are sent to the Drains."

Kinst shrugged. "Send me," he murmured. "If you do, who will make the Great Towerman's beautiful gold statues? Who but I can do that to suit him—"

"Be still, you dog!" shouted Ransome. "For even mentioning the Great Towerman's name I can have you lashed. Let the woman tell her story."

The woman Anna snivelled a tale that matched that of her chosen man. She was frightened, only half intelligible with her coarse, choking voice, and altogether unlovely.

Ransome listened judicially; then appeared to think. To Fortune he whispered, "See, now I have a good idea. It would never do to hurt this Kinst; he is too good a workman. Wolff would be furious if we spoiled him. The other man will probably die of his wounds, but punishment must be given in some way, so let the woman be the means! Besides, I see how this can be worked into a rare joke that will keep the barracks chuckling for days. Mark you, Fortune, how one can get amusement even out of the day's work."

Ransome leveled an accusing finger at Kinst, to whom the woman Anna was clinging for comfort and protection.

"You have broken the law, Kinst, both by trying to kill and by taking lightly the name of the Great Towerman. Now you must pay, and this is how you shall pay. The woman Anna shall be taken away from you—"

"Oh, oh, oh!" Anna sobbed hysterically. Kinst took a heavy step forward, his fists clenched, but one of the guard thrust him back.

"The woman shall be taken from you," repeated Ransome. "I will have her shut up in a cell, and there she shall stay until some officer of the guard fancies her; if not an officer then let the brave soldiers choose! But do not worry for her, Kinst. She's a rare beauty. I can assure you she'll not languish long!"

Ransome chuckled over his joke a moment, then added sharply, "In the name of Wolff and the Directorate let this justice be done. Petty-captain, your next case."

Kinst, the goldsmith, advanced, defying the soldiers who reached to push him aside. His hands opened and closed rapidly, his breast heaved, and his eyes, fixed fearlessly on Ransome's scowling face, blazed defiance.

"You," he choked, "you, captain—I—"

"Take that man away," Ransome ordered curtly. "Give him ten lashes before he is sent back to his bench. Next case!"

It was well that several men at once sprang at the goldsmith, for at that moment the woman Anna screamed as

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she struggled against the men who were leading her away, and Kinst fought like a wild beast.

"Phew!" sighed Ransome. "That's the liveliest session in months, but I flatter myself I got out of it safely. The lash can't spoil Kinst's skill at working gold for Wolff."

The other cases before that strange court were minor infractions which Ransome dealt with quickly. One man, a dark-skinned, undersized little wretch with the eyes of a cornered rat, was accused of treason. He had been caught haranguing a group of his fellows, and witnesses declared he said: "Some day the torch will blaze again and the Folk will be freed of their masters. Then there will be no Towerman or Directorate save the free Folk themselves."

Those who repeated this heresy did so in the awed voice of children testifying to a blasphemy.

Ransome consigned this heretic to the prison in the Drains, to remain there, as he said with a smile, "Until the Torch shall burn again."

The petty-captain and his men and the assembled witnesses smiled respectfully at his joke, and the sitting ended in general good humor.

"It seemed that your judgment was unnecessarily harsh." Fortune commented as they left the Under City.

"So it must be," Ransome assured him. "And more severe as time goes on, for the Folk are getting too many. Some day, if we don't have a war or a pestilence to thin them out, I tell you we'll have to burn them in batches even for the lesser crimes. They are too many, I say. In Cantonment Six you may not be worried by it, but if you ever go among the big cantonments, where the common laborers live!"

TOWARD EVENING of the next day a little boat with a rag of sail slipped quietly toward the Isle of the Great Woman, and Fortune and Ham sat in it, peering at the strangest sight of their strange, mad age. The little island was covered with a dense forest growth that stopped only at the tide mark of its beach, but from its center, towering high above the thickets, rose a colossal figure in partial ruin.

Silhouetted against the brightening evening sky, they could see that this relic of an ancient time was the representation in giant form of a woman, though the face, bending down upon them, was obliterated, and in several places great wounds in the body let the evening light shine through.

The giant figure had been molded in the attitude of one striding, the dragging foot raised upon its toe, the vast body balancing in a beautiful line of action. But from the uptilted shoulder, where once, it was plain, an arm had lifted, there stuck up only a jagged stump of metal plates. The other arm, clasped against the breast, held a tablet. This was the original of that model Fortune had seen Wolff exhibiting, the Great Woman of the Isle.

In color this great metal figure was the dull green of corroded copper, and where it had been gashed and wounded detail of its metal skeleton showed through. An adventurous creeper of unusual strength and thickness had climbed as high as the bent arm, and dangled ragged streamers in the soft breeze.

Gazing up at this mystery of a lost civilization—this overawing colossus in woman's form—Fortune and his man felt the spell of it upon them and paid tribute with their silence. From the island there came no sound except the wash of water on the sand. Across the bay, glowing in silken blue, there showed the ruined walls of the ancient New York.

It was Ham who stirred uneasily. "Do you see the maid yet?" he grumbled.

"Not yet, but I believe we shall find her," Fortune answered.

"Better we had come at noon," Ham muttered. "I don't like this place in the dark—"

"And I said it was better to wait," Fortune declared. "We're better off if others don't see us. There must be others on the island—"

"Who would live there in a haunted place?" grumbled Ham.

"Well, fool, the maid can't be there alone! Besides, that brief time I spoke to her, she warned me there were others, others who would not welcome me. I remember hearing it said that once a Highborn, one of the Directorate, they say, fled here to live, though that must have been long ago."

"Suppose she does not come?" questioned Ham.

"Then we must go find her. Now we'll land, leave the boat where it can quickly be floated again, and hide ourselves. Ham, she'll come; I know it—I'm sure of it!"

"A plague on this foolishness!" Ham complained to himself. "If we're not both

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killed by Wild Folk, the devils that must haunt the ruin will surely get us. I can feel sure, too, and I'm sure no good will come of this."

Nevertheless, Ham hid the boat as he was bidden and crawled quietly into the thicket beside Fortune.

Perhaps half an hour they had waited when Fortune's hand tightened convulsively over Ham's sleeve and the boundman saw a woman's figure on the beach, walking slowly toward them.

The woman—she had a girl's slimness and carriage—would instantly have been noticed among a hundred because of her graceful and free stride. She wore a robe, light gray in color, that was caught only by a girdle at the hips and revealed the fine, delicate modeling of a strong young body. Her head was uncovered, and the dark hair parted low over her broad forehead. They could see that her large eyes tilted slightly at the outer corners and the finely drawn brows arched high above them.

She walked with her face turned toward the sky, breathing deeply. To Fortune the sight of her passing was like a great chord of half-forgotten music that stirred something deep within him and made him hesitate a moment in his plans.

Then suddenly his hand tightened over Ham's wrist. "Now," he whispered. The two of them crept out from the tangle and started at a run, silently, one at each side of the unconscious object of their pursuit.

Almost simultaneously they seized her. Fortune's hand grasped a warm, soft shoulder while with his other arm he reached to stifle a scream.

One brief second he was aware of the woman he held—her faint perfume, the warmth of her body, her struggle under his hand—then something overwhelming hurled him to the earth. He was conscious of the roaring of a deep voice and the passage of a tremendous body. Then he heard Ham's shout—a shout unlike anything he had ever heard from the man, no battle-cry or bellow of rage, but something kin to a scream of pure terror.

Shakily Fortune lifted himself by his hands and stared. His eyes comprehended vast, pillarlike legs, bare, their corded muscles writhing—rose higher and discerned the barrel of a body, the mighty breadth of shoulder, and the small, bullet head with waving mane. Then he saw Ham; Ham lifted high in giant arms and so held poised a moment.

There came another of those earthshaking roars and the lifting arms hurled their squirming burden as easily as a man could hurl a baby, throwing Ham far to one side, among the rocks. Ham lay flattened and still, a mere heap of clothes.

The gigantic man turned slowly, and Fortune noted his bright eyes, peering through the mat of hair, seeking him.

And with that he was on his feet and running, crashing straight into the wood, falling often, but up again and on, heedless of the twining vines and the slashing briers, dodging behind the larger trees, crawling sometimes through the smaller growth, his only instinct that of blind terror, his only desire to escape. Behind him came thrashing news of a giant's progress.

Perhaps minutes, perhaps hours, certainly not so very long a time, Fortune dashed on blindly, suddenly to be aware that he stood at the base of the ruined colossus. The wood stood open a little about the high stone parapet. He saw stairs and darted toward them.

He ran up frantically and through a door, into the great figure itself. A hasty glance about showed him more stairs mounting in a long spiral. His feet clattered against their steel treads.

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In the dusk, halfway up that first flight, he saw something coming toward him, a boy or man, he was not sure. Arms seemed to stretch out to hold him, but he burst past furiously.

Higher and higher the spiral of narrow stairs mounted, past one balcony and another. A shaft of light came in from one of the jagged tears of the ruin and showed him he was halfway to its summit.

Then another terrifying shout boomed through the metal walls and the stair shook to a heavy foot far below. Fortune climbed on, sobbing for breath.

The top at last! Then—what?

His questing glance saw the daylight streaming through a door in the metal. He seemed to be standing almost within the giant head of the statue, among steel girders and bent metal plating.

He thrust his head out of the portal, and looked upon a shelf of gently curving metal. He was at the base of the Great Woman's neck. Shoving through the opening, he crawled out and found himself standing on her chest, half leaning against the column of her throat, gasping for air.

From within came the thunder of his pursuer's rage. He edged rapidly away from the opening that had let him into the air, dragging himself fearfully along the ridge of the immense, uplifted shoulder.

Then his eyes turned down, and nausea seized him and laid him flat.

There he crouched hiding, knowing now the feelings of the cornered rat.

FORTUNE already had proved his courage better than that of the average soldier, but even a courageous man may be frightened at something outside his knowledge. The gigantic man who had pursued him to this giddy refuge on the shoulder of the colossal statue was a terror beyond anything the young soldier had experienced. It was some time before his panic subsided and his mind began to question his predicament.

From within the metal walls of the Great Woman came the noise of pursuers. Above him was only the evening sky, flooding slowly to a glowing palette of sunset color; underfoot the corroded metal plates bent into the semblance of a human form, but in proportions so great that the eye could only comprehend its plan from considerable distance.

His desire was to hide, to hide until darkness would be a partner to his escape—but where?

By an effort he conquered the giddiness caused by his height above the earth and, rising, walked cautiously about the gentle curve of the up-thrust shoulder, peering over fearfully into the ridges and valleys made by the folds of the Great Woman's drapery.

The slope of some of these folds seemed gentle enough for a man to crawl down them. He remembered now that when he was in his little boat, gazing up at the statue, he had seen a huge creeper dangling from the arm that clasped the tablet. Perhaps this great vine would sustain his weight—would prove a rope to let him into the forest.

With cautious steps he began retracing his path around the neck of the figure, keeping one hand against the metal wall of throat to give him confidence. This led him past the opening beneath the throat whence he had crawled out, and he hurried, fearful that his pursuer would reach out a giant arm to detain him. It added nothing to his confidence to note that the opening was quite large enough to emit even a man of huge proportion.

He realized that the need for hurry was desperate.

Staring down from the opposite side, he could see, beyond the swell of chest, the great niche made by the crooked arm, and he even glimpsed a bit of the creeper that had found anchorage there. To gain that niche he must slide his body down a long, funnel-like trough where the draperies of the figure creased. Even the thought of it made him dizzy. His knees grew weak.

Desperation forced him to the edge of the slope—forced him to thrust one foot downward, tentatively.

Then, beneath him, he caught a sight of a man's head. The head had been thrust out of one of those ragged holes in the vast metal structure. It disappeared, appeared again, and then the man crawled out cautiously, lowered his body, hands gripping the edge of the hole, and dropped.

From the height where Fortune peered any man would seem small, but there was something in this brief glimpse of this fellow that instantly impressed his brain as abnormal.

It was only a second's glimpse he had, for the body slipped down in a flash and Fortune knew the man had dropped into some niche of the metal work.

Instinct told him this man was moving to cut off his retreat.

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On hands and knees Fortune peered far over the edge, his eye sweeping the contours for some sign of the man's progress. It came in a glimpse of moving shoulder, again a hand, gripping at the metal wall, and then a brief view of the back of the man's head. He was moving rapidly toward the very niche of the bent arm Fortune had selected for a refuge.

A loud shout from behind brought him instantly to his feet. He whirled about, drawing his sword, and ran back to the door in the neck of the figure.

A huge hand grasped either side of the portal, and in the dusk within Fortune caught the gleam of the giant man's eyes.

His sword flashed, quick as light, against the nearest hand, but the fingers were withdrawn so quickly that the blade only grated on metal. Keeping his body well to one side, Fortune began a desperate defense of the door, his flashing sword quick to dart toward any part of the big fellow's person that showed.

To his sudden astonishment a huge peal of laughter, magnified by the hollow metal walls to a thunderous roll, issued from his foe's throat.

"Well played, little wasp," the big voice rumbled. "Well played!"

"Back, you dog!" Fortune shouted, angry at being laughed at. "This wasp can sting—"

"Ho!" chuckled the giant, nevertheless keeping well out of sword thrust. "Ho! Yield you quietly, my wasp, or I'll flatten you under my foot. Will you come here and be killed in this spider's web, or must the old spider come out?"

"Come out, if you dare!" Fortune taunted.

"Why, I don't like your sting, Mr. Wasp!" His foe bared his white teeth in a grin. "Nevertheless, I shall come get you when I'm ready, since your kind must be killed. I wonder do you soldiers of the Tower People ever attack men—ah, you would! Next time I'll grab your leg for that and pull you in! A brave young soldier truly —against young girls!"

PERHAPS Fortune, in his rage, might have ventured in to his death if there had not come another interruption at this moment. A yell of defiance caused him to wheel and charge with his sword toward the opposite side of the tower of neck.

The man whom he had seen creeping out of the statue had mounted to the raised shoulder and was defying him. In the moment he comprehended this Fortune saw that his new foe was crooked-backed, which gave him that peculiar dwarfed appearance which he had noted before.

The crooked-backed man waited his coming confidently, brandishing his arms and yelling taunts until they were almost face to face, then he deliberately stepped back from the wide shoulder and cast himself over the declivity.

The suddenness of his disappearance made Fortune gasp. Had he thrown himself to destruction? He bent forward to peer over and saw that the other had merely slid, face down, along one of the metal troughs that represented folded drapery.

Then two mighty hands pinned his arms to his sides. He was picked up, as helpless as a child, and turned around until his face pressed against the giant's coarse cloth shirt. He had been caught by a trick!

A moment he suffocated in the folds of the cloth, his feet barely touching the metal platform, and he realized that, tall as he was, he came no higher than his captor's heart.

With all his might Fortune kicked at the pillar-like legs, but because his feet were clad in soft leather his kicks were as innocuous as a child's struggles. Then he was lifted higher, and the great arms extended him in the air for inspection.

There was a look of stupid good nature on his gigantic captor's face. Like some huge dog pawing at the wasp that has annoyed him, he seemed more puzzled and amused than resentful. Yet immediately Fortune knew his death was close.

"What did I say?" shouted the big man exultantly. "Now the old spider's got you, my wasp. You'll sting no more! We have no need of such poisonous vermin here, so—" Terrible, swift action completed the sentence. Fortune was swept high in the air, kicking and writhing impotently. With a great rush he felt himself poised, his face to the sky, while the arms that held him slowly drew back and stiffened to hurl him into eternity.

He closed his eyes. His senses reeled.

"So!" boomed the great man.

"Shard!"

A woman spoke sharply, as one would address a dog. Fortune sensed a sudden hesitation in the other's purpose.

"Shard! Put him down. Put him down; you hear me?"

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"Go back—go back, Mary," the giant muttered. "This is not for your eyes—"

"Put that man down!" The woman's command fairly crackled with will power.

Fortune was lowered gently until once more his feet touched the metal plates.

"There," the voice went on, although he could not see the speaker because of the position in which he was held. "There, we'll have no more murders."

"But, Mary—dear Mary, listen, isn't this the man?"

"Yes, it's the man."

"He attacked you!" exclaimed the giant.

"And you did well to catch him, but let us have law here among the comrades. Are we Wild Folk, to kill this way! The law will take his life. Let him wait for a fair trial; we need not wait long for that."

"Better to kill him now and have done," grumbled the other, but he turned about, wheeling Fortune with him, and carried his captive through the door into the statue.

The woman had stepped back to let them pass. Fortune's eyes for a second met the wonderful gray eyes of the girl of the isle, but reading in them only contempt, he snatched his glance elsewhere.

Propelled by Shard's great hands he stumbled down interminable flights of the winding metal stair, through the gloom.

As they came opposite one of the holes in the ruin there was a shout and the face of the crooked-backed man peered in.

"Got him, eh?" he shouted.

"Aye, Tringe—but she won't let me kill him. Says he's to have a trial!"

Tringe swung himself through the hole and stood before Fortune, inspecting him critically. He looked like a gnome in that pale light, head thrust forward from his bent spine, raising as homely a face as ever a man wore. Like his spine, his features were cruelly twisted so that the nose had no bridge, and the wide mouth was set slantwise across his cheeks. His eyes were brown and strangely luminous. They were large as a woman's eyes, and held a quick intelligence.

"A big fellow," Tringe observed coolly, as if Fortune were some sort of strange fish the other had hauled out of the sea. "An over-captain, if that uniform doesn't lie. Why, Shard, this looks like the man Fortune—you know, the man who fought on the wall that I told you about?"

"Well, wherever he fought, he'll fight no more," rumbled Shard.

"Come," Tringe ordered, "is that your name? Are you Fortune?"

FORTUNE glared at his crooked little questioner. "Go to the devil!" he gritted.

"I believe it is he," mused Tringe. "Well, well, this is a catch. I must tell Zorn. Ho, Mary, is that you there in the shadow? What d'you think, this looks like that Captain Fortune who held the wall! Zorn must know of this."

Tringe clattered down the long stairs far ahead of them. The girl had made no reply. Fortune was pushed on by his giant captor.

At the foot of the long stair they passed through a room of considerable size, where several men pressed forward to stare and ask questions. Then they descended more steps of stone into a chilly underground warren of passages that ended at last in a small, stone cell. Into this Fortune was shoved without ceremony, and the thick wooden door slammed and bolted upon him.

Before that door was opened again, Fortune had regained his composure. Who these captors were he had no notion, but one thing was clear—for all their talk of a trial it was plain they meant to kill him.

He experienced a certain cynical wonder that any of the folk could be so banded together as to avenge a wrong against a mere woman. Among the Tower People such a thing might be expected, but for the Folk to talk of laws was something new.

He was prepared to die with all the dignity a soldier should display when his cell door was thrust back and the gigantic man seized him rudely. He was hustled along various corridors and upstairs, finally to be introduced into a lighted room where a tall, spare figure in a black robe sat at a table, reading a book.

So great was Fortune's surprise at finding this man engaged in what to-day would seem a simple, every-day act, that for a time he was blind to all other details. A book! Once he had seen a book such as the ancients used and examined it with lively curiosity, but little understanding.

He knew that books were made in characters different from the common handwriting which young officers were taught to understand and employ to a limited extent. Only great scholars possessed the key to the riddle of printed

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"You were long in coming here, captain—
I am afraid you came unwillingly!"

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book pages. Never before had he seen a man read one.

If the man at the table had been turning water into wine or making diamonds from pebbles, Fortune could have been no more fascinated.

Shard grumbled in his throat to attract the reader's attention. "Comrade Zorn," he said respectfully, "this is the man who attacked Mary. You asked to see him?"

He addressed as Zorn laid aside his book with a sigh, methodically marking his page with a small knife that lay before him. Fortune was at once impressed by the vigor of the man and the keenness of his glance.

He wore no head covering and his hair was black on the crown, but white about his temples. It was close-cut. Beneath a noble forehead eyes of light blue, rather deeply set, blazed with some hidden fire of thought.

Zorn's robe of somber black, without an ornament, shrouded about his spare frame gave him an ascetic appearance which was enhanced by his pallid skin and the thinness of his tapering hands.

"Very good, Shard. Leave us alone." Zorn spoke quietly, and from his tone Fortune instantly recognized that this was no man of the Folk.

The giant shuffled undecidedly. Zorn gave him a quiet glance. Shard released his prisoner and left the room with the air of a stubborn and rebellious child.

"They tell me you are that young captain who held the wall against the Wild Folk," Zorn began, appraising Fortune with his eyes.

Fortune hesitated. Suddenly released, he was at loss whether to fly at the man's throat and score at least one more death before his own occurred, or whether to attempt escape from the ruin. But Zorn's manner imposed Zorn's will on him. He answered as he would have answered Wolff himself, even adding an unconscious "sir" to his words. "My name is Fortune; I held the wall, and I am an over-captain in the army of the Tower People."

"YOU HAVE broken our law, Captain Fortune." Zorn spoke without heat, rather musingly. "You must pay the penalty—you know that?"

Fortune shrugged. "I know no law of yours," he began disdainfully, but Zorn's look and words halted him.

"But you know right from wrong? It is only childish for you to quibble, captain. You deserve to die for what you have done, and doubtless your death will be the will of the comrades, yet." Zorn stopped and watched Fortune narrowly, studying him.

"Let me remind you," said the prisoner finally, "that I am an officer of the army of the Directorate. I am a military servant of the High-born. If your people as much as touch me again—"

The other waved away the threat with a graceful hand. "You are wasting breath," he declared with contempt. "You cannot frighten us—we are not children here. Do not for a minute think, captain, that any consideration shown you is consideration for your rank or the Tower People. Here there are no Tower People. But, as a man, I am not sure but you do deserve more thought.

"It is true you have acted like a criminal," Zorn went on evenly, "and you should die like an outlaw. Yet, I can see you are young and you doubtless did according to your own conception of your rights. And you are intelligent—"

"What do you want of me?"

"If anything besides your death it might be, possibly, your knowledge of military affairs. Your ability as a drill-master—"

"I owe allegiance only to Wolff," said Fortune stiffly.

"Certainly," Zorn agreed to the young man's surprise. "I would think less of you if you gave me another answer—at present. But if, after you had seen and understood for yourself, if then you could see the justice of what we are doing, you might be able to repay us by your service for your offense. After all, no harm is done. You merely acted like a beast because you know no better. Suppose we talk it over with the Comrades."

Zorn rose. "You will give your word to come quietly?" he suggested.

Fortune understood perfectly that there were men to curb him if he became defiant. He nodded. Together they left the room and presently pushed through another door to a large hall.

The hall was brightly lighted and it held probably a hundred men. At Zorn's entrance they rose as a mark of respect, but when they caught sight of Fortune a confused shouting began that started a riot.

Fists were shaken at the young captain. Men struggled and leaped by one another's shoulders to see him better.

"That's the man!"

"He attacked our Mary!"

"Hang him! Burn him!"

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"Kill, kill, kill!"

"Death for Wolff's slave-drivers!"

The concentrated hatred of their chorus struck Fortune with the surprise of an unexpected blow in the face.

CHAPTER IV

FORTUNE GIVES HIS PROMISE

IT WAS ZORN who quieted the outburst of hate. He did it by the simple expedient of stepping to the edge of the platform and raising his hands to invoke silence. As he began to speak the assembled men slipped hastily to their benches and listened with the docility of children.

"Are we men, endowed with reason, or are we beasts?" Zorn reproved them. "We tell ourselves we are gathered here in the cause of justice and human rights—and we act exactly like the Wild Folk! Enough of this!"

The last murmur had subsided. Every eye was fixed on Zorn with a respectful attention that amounted to absolute veneration.

Fortune began to note individuals in this audience. He saw that every man wore the bracelet of the Folk, yet there was something about each one of them which would have made him remarked among the mass of the people of the Under City. Certainly it was not dress or feature or carriage, for in these respects they were as unprepossessing as the rank and file of the people who slaved for the Directorate.

Fortune decided that it was the eyes of these men which distinguished them. Every glance held a quicker intelligence than the common—something of self-respect and mental alertness.

"Mary—" Zorn turned to the girl who had entered close behind them. "Unveil the figure," he directed. "As you sincerely mean what you said to me about this man, pray for him to-night!"

Fortune had noticed that in the center of the wall backing the stage there was a huge, curtained niche. The girl Mary stepped before this niche and raised her hand to open the draperies. Instantly every man in the room fixed his attention on her.

The curtains swung aside under Mary's hand and there stood revealed in life size, a duplicate of the colossal figure that topped the ruin they were in—the Great Woman of the ancients, its missing arm restored, the face finished as of old so that it reflected a majestic but benevolent purpose. Fortune saw that the Great Woman in this restoration bore aloft a torch and in this torch there glowed a little leaping flame.

Instantly he thought of Wolff, the Great Towerman, exhibiting his golden statuette bearing the sword, and though he could not have told why, he was swept by a thrill of adoration that recognized in the revealed symbol something he knew to be the truth.

Before the image Mary stood like some high priestess of a strange faith. Her raised face was transfixed in an ecstasy. She held her slim, graceful young body rigid. The creamy-brown of her cheeks—the healthful tan that only keen, out-of-door life can give—flooded with color, and her grayish eyes glowed deep blue.

She spoke, and the music of her deep, clear voice was a hymn of praise.

"Goddess of the Torch, famed of old, thou Lamp to guide our feet in dark ways, giver of just laws and guardian of freedom, to you we pray, Lady of Justice, kindle the light in our hearts. Quiet our passions. Give us knowledge for our guidance. Strengthen our arms to battle for the right, but temper our will to resist the

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disorders of human folly. Lead our hosts into battle, but counsel us that we may not do those things which would shame thy name. Restore that freedom that is our ancient birthright and make us strong to preserve it and to keep thy torch burning clear. In the name of humanity we ask this!"

She stopped, and a sigh rose from the attentive audience. Zorn, who stood close to Fortune, mused in a voice scarcely audible, "It always quiets them! Men must have symbols and images to hold them to a purpose—like children playing games!"

Then Mary spoke again. She continued to address the Great Woman's image:

"There is one here guilty of an act of oppression," she prayed. "He is no evil-doer, only a product of his time, misled by ignorance. Give us vision to see the truth and strength to deal justly by him."

Fortune felt his cheeks burn. He was bitterly humiliated that a mere girl of the Folk should speak in his defense, yet more than humiliation, he felt a confused sense of shame. With sudden surprise he recognized his own wrongdoing. He did not know where to look or how to bear himself.

"Comrades—" Zorn stepped forward again. "This man here, our prisoner, is Fortune, over-captain in the army of the Tower People—"

A groan of derision interrupted him.

"He is a soldier—a brave soldier, and a skilled one, nevertheless," Zorn continued firmly. "There is no need to let our prejudice blind us to that! He also is a young man, hasty, ignorant of any rights save those of his class and his superiors—and he is guilty of attempting to seize our own Mary."

Again the muttering interrupted him.

"I have heard all the story," Zorn resumed, after a moment. "I know something of what this young captain has done on the north wall. He is that same Fortune who held back the Wild Folk with but half a company at his back."

NOW men craned their necks eagerly to stare at the hero of the wall. Old habit returned and Fortune stared back haughtily, disdainful of these humble men.

"It is easy to say, 'kill this man,'" counselled Zorn. "It is simple enough to do it, but what does it profit us? I ask you to consider our own need. We must have such a man as this, a soldier who can make soldiers of us, if we are to carry out our plan. Chance sends us the very man we need. Shall we use him?"

"Will he serve us?" shouted a frowzy-headed fellow, whose face was smudged with soot, evidently from the armorers' cantonment.

"Never!" said Fortune with bitter emphasis, staring proudly down on them.

The hubbub renewed itself. Zorn turned a flashing eye on the defiant soldier.

"Cheap words, young captain!" he declared with a scorn that made Fortune wince. "Cheap words! But you are young—and ignorant." To the assembly he went on, "Mary herself disclaims all wish for vengeance against this soldier. She will sacrifice personal feeling to the good of the cause. I ask that you ignore his youthful defiance, that you reason like men—and give me time, time to open his eyes—"

"Yes, but he defies us!" shouted the armorer.

"He'll betray us!" yelled another in the blue smock of a road-mender.

"Comrades," began a third, a wild-eyed, long-haired fellow whose skin was dirty yellow from close living, and whose clothes were covered with the lint and yarn of the looms, "comrades, what good can come of coddling one of Wolff's slave-drivers, one of these oppressors of the weak? Kill him—"

Mary herself interrupted here. Men glanced into her bright eyes and looked aside guiltily, but they listened, and it was evident the girl could turn them any way she chose.

"I ask you for this soldier's life," she began eagerly. "There has been one murder because of him already—his man is dead by Shard's hand. In time to come his kind must pay in bloodshed for the wrongs they have done. The city will drip with their blood, and the innocent will die with the guilty. In the name of humanity let no life be taken that we can spare!

"By all right this man's fate is in my hands. I choose to spare him, less from pity—though I hope I can pity even such a soldier of the Tower People—but more because I see in him the tool we can use in our work. Let him live among us thirty days. Let him have every opportunity to learn what it is we are doing. If then he cannot see the justice of our cause, if he cannot join us, I give him back to you. Do you consent?"

"Aye! Let him live!" The consent was general.

Fortune had stared in dumb amazement at this girl who pleaded for his life. In every word he read her contempt for him, but instead of resenting it, he was over-

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whelmed by shame. Still his confused mind found room for a thrilling admiration, not for her physical beauty and charm alone, but for her quick intelligence and nobility. He was mentally and spiritually in a state of chaos, and there was nothing in the world he knew to serve as his compass.

Zorn addressed him. "Captain, do you give me your word as a soldier to accept this decision, to live among us here for thirty days, to study our purpose with an open mind, and then declare whether you are for or against us?"

He accepted this strange reprieve mechanically, too vastly amazed to feel relief even at an escape from certain death.

"You will have the freedom of the island," Zorn instructed him. "I will give you every facility to learn the plans and purpose of the Comrades of the Torch. I ask you to judge with an open mind. And while you are among us, studying on an equality, bear in mind your position. To try to escape, to attempt any treachery, means your death."

The meeting turned its attention to other business. In a few moments Fortune was as forgotten as if he had never been. He sat toward the rear of the platform, alone, absorbed for a time in his own bewilderment.

When gradually he became aware of other events and began to listen he heard news fully as astonishing as anything that had happened to him.

It was a remark of the sooty-faced armorer, a man they called Gross, that recalled his attention.

"The stocking of our secret arsenal in the old, blind tunnels has made progress," this man was declaring. "The task is a difficult one when each man must do what he can at such times as the police-guard are not near, but every man of us is inspired to do his best. Of shields and breastplates we have enough for a thousand men. In swords we are still lacking, because the forging of a sword is work for a skilled man, and we who can do that are fewer. But there I saw bows for two thousand and a great store of arrows. Spear-points, too, we have in plenty, and our brothers of the woodshops will bring in the shafts. Comrades, we men of the forges are not shirking! May the gods speed the day when our work will see its reward."

Applause greeted this report. Other men in turn brought messages, and Fortune began to realize with a tingle of excitement that the veiled distrust of the Folk he had heard among the High-born was not without a foundation. Rebellion was brewing!

And it became clear to him that this was no ordinary outburst of passion, not one of the sudden, sporadic uprisings which had been more or less common in his time. This was more than rebellion—they were plotting revolution.

And not only were these men plotting—they were doing. A superior intelligence was guiding them, and it needed no second thought to guess that that intelligence was this black-robed man, Zorn.

And another thing impressed him. These men who talked—plainly they were agents sent out among the Folk to spread the propaganda of revolution—spoke with a clear understanding and reflected a stern purpose. They were far above the Folk in their grasp of the situation. They recognized the weaknesses of their schemes, deplored the cross-purposes of selfish interests, discussed the necessity of a unified plan.

IN SHORT, they were educated men—men fully as capable of planning and carrying out a plan as the soldiers of the Tower Rule, and far more capable than they in one thing, a stern inflexibility of purpose.

The thing was a miracle!

Where had men of the Folk got this knowledge? How? Again Fortune saw behind them the master hand of Zorn. For the black-robed genius whose power extended in secret throughout the Under City he conceived an admiration that amounted to awe.

Why, if one dared suppose for an instant that this mad plan could succeed, Zorn threatened the power of the Directorate itself! Given the chance, he might become the Great Towerman—a man more powerful than Wolff!

What Fortune could not comprehend was the magic Zorn had used to bind men to him. He heard frequent repetition of such phrases as: "That freedom which was the birthright of the ancient"; and "the right of every man to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," but to his ears these were as unintelligible as an alien tongue.

So he sat puzzled, only half comprehending, viewing a scene without parallel in the history of our civilization—the first steps toward the reestablishment of liberty in America.

Later he would learn how the strange man Zorn and the girl known as Mary of the Isle, sheltered by the ruins of that

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statue known to the ancients as the Goddess of Liberty, had rekindled the almost dying flame of freedom. He would learn how, from the miserable refugees who escaped the slavery of the Tower People this heroic pair formed the nucleus of the movement which set men free and established our government of to-day much as it was organized before that century of blackness in which he lived. There would come a day when Fortune could look back upon this bewildering evening and thrill to the drama of history; boast that he had seen with his own eyes.

But to-night he saw only dirty faces and wild glances; heard only alarming threats against the established order that, to him, was right and truth.

He failed to grasp, beneath surface incongruities, the virile impulse which bound these men to a sacred cause, and made heroes, against their own will, of Folk of the commonest clay.

That every man has a right to own and sell the products of his labor; to own land and a home if he can earn it; to pay no tax except his just share of the common burden is a commonplace of to-day. To Fortune it was wild nonsense.

The meeting concluded when the Comrades had again pledged their loyalty to the Lady of the Torch. They dispersed hastily, and Fortune gathered from their talk that they came by small boats to the island, meeting there often. He knew that policing of the Under City was slack, and it was easily possible for desperate men to leave their assigned cantonments by dark.

With Zorn at his side, Fortune walked from the hall, his head in a whirl.

Zorn spoke abruptly. "The man who came with you," he said, "was he servant or friend?"

"Both," Fortune answered. "Such a servant as no man could wish better and such a friend as few men ever owned."

"His body will be buried to-night. It waits, in fact, only because I guessed something of the sort. Will you see it?"

Fortune nodded. Zorn conducted him to a small, cold cell where the body of Ham had been laid on a bench, decently wrapped in his cloak.

There Zorn left the young captain. For a long time Fortune remained, staring dumbly into the white face of the man who had long been his companion; who had so often gone without food or sleep to serve his wish; who had so often risked his life to shield his master.

In a few short hours the young man's world had gone quite mad. He had seen and heard things which made him dumb with astonishment; he had passed through adventures that seemed to numb all emotion.

But this silent clay before him, this homely, familiar face recalled the past. It was not to his discredit that he found his eyes wet with unexpected tears.

His hand touched the cold hand of his servant and friend. "Ham," he choked, "Ham—my friend—forgive me!"

A FEW days more, and Fortune must give his answer to the Comrades of the Torch. If he close to accept their beliefs there was before him the dubious prospect of training soldiers for a crazy cause—a cause he considered hopeless.

If he refused that offer they would kill him.

A third alternative was escape from the Isle of the Great Woman. More and more that thought occupied his attention.

As the weeks passed Fortune had lost his first hope that Alda or Wenn would come to his rescue. It was but a faint hope that they could find him, for to nobody had the young man confided his plans when he sailed from the Manhattan shore.

Wenn did seek for his captain, as thoroughly as he knew how, and the Highborn, Wolff's daughter, urged him to new efforts. But neither of them could solve the mystery of Fortune's disappearance.

So with the passing weeks the prisoner had maintained an appearance of interest in the plans of Zorn, the recluse, while secretly his thoughts were busy with two absorbing problems: how to escape, and how to take along the girl, Mary, with him.

Of Mary he had seen much. Zorn had given to her the task of instructing Fortune in the ideals of the strange brotherhood. Even the eloquence of this strange young woman, known to the Comrades as the Torch-child, left his mind unmoved. But her daily companionship had played havoc with his affections.

From Zorn, Fortune had learned what he early suspected—that this girl was no child of the Folk. Like Zorn himself, who had quit Manhattan when his awakened conscience would no longer let him enjoy the empty honor of being Director of Knowledge, Mary was a refugee.

Her father had been of the Tower People. He had died and left a baby daughter

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with none to care for her. Zorn had taken this ward, and it was Zorn who taught her all the hidden wisdom found in ancient books as well as how to ride and fence and shoot a bow.

The very thought of Mary was a delicious torture to Fortune. Above anything on earth he coveted her. A hundred times as he sat beside her or walked with her he was ready to foreswear all ambition, to forget allegiance pledged to Wolff and the Tower Rule, to throw away every claim to normal life if by that he could win her.

And a hundred times more he had been stopped by the knowledge that he could not take up her cause with sincerity—the wrongs of the Folk left him unmoved.

No higher tribute to Mary can be recorded than the spirit of honesty she created in the conscienceless young captain of the Tower People, an honesty strong enough to hold him back from the very thing he most desired.

If he would escape, but a few days remained in which to make a plan. A few days, and he must give his final answer to these Comrades of the Torch.

If it were not for Mary he easily could have lied, and played the traitor at the earliest convenience. She made that rôle impossible.

Of the permanent members of this revolutionary group less than a score lived on the Isle of the Great Woman, keeping by day under cover of its grove, so that few of the Tower People of Manhattan guessed the place was inhabited. Among them Fortune had a wide freedom, yet he knew that he was constantly watched.

The gigantic Shard was often near him, and, when Shard was not, the crooked-backed Tringe appeared in the rôle of shadow.

* * *

The little humpback spent his days flying big kites, and Fortune was at first inclined to think him a half-wit, but he noticed that during their infrequent conversations it was Tringe who won the honors easily. Months later, when he understood the kites, he wondered at his own blindness.

Shard proved merely a stupid and naturally good-natured fellow. But what he lacked in knowledge and cunning wit his companion and closest friend, the humpback, made up with overflowing measure so that one or the other of these watchmen seemed always to anticipate Fortune's intentions and be present to discourage him.

There remained to him one last hope—the possibility of finding some man he could bribe to carry a message to Alda. He looked for such a one among the Comrades who gathered at the meetings which occurred twice a week.

Sometimes these agents from the Under City who came to report progress of the revolutionary propaganda brought with them strange converts to the cause.

These were usually miserable beings, often mutilated by some official cruelty of their masters, or half starved and fevered with the privations of their hiding-places or the prisons in the Drains where they had been kept.

One night Fortune recognized a familiar face. Memory placed the man as the victim of Ransome's justice that morning he had sat in court in the gold workers' cantonment. The man was Kinst, the maker of Wolff's golden images—Kinst, who loved the woman Anna and who had seen Anna torn from him.

* * *

Directly the business of the meeting was finished, Fortune made an opportunity and drew Kinst aside. He saw a way to make this man serve his purpose.

"Tell me, Kinst," he said coolly to the goldsmith, "what of your woman Anna—what lucky man got her?"

Kinst stared as if he had seen a ghost. He began to tremble. "Who are you?" he whispered.

"You do not know me, then?"

Fortune had abandoned his uniform and armor at Zorn's suggestion, and wore the plain, coarse garb of the Comrades.

"You are not of my cantonment," Kinst muttered. "No, you are no gold worker, and yet I have seen you!" He seized Fortune by either arm, and his hands were shaking.

"Have you seen *her?*" he whispered eagerly. "Does she live? Is she—is she—what have they done with her? Whoever you are, in the name of mercy tell me!"

His pleading voice quavered in a high, cracked note of utter misery that brought a shiver to the man who played with him.

"Hush, not so loud!" Fortune cautioned irritably. "Look at me, Kinst, look well, and I'll tell you of the morning when Ransome sat in judgment and took your

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woman from you." He began to describe Ransom's justice.

Suddenly Kinst shrank back against the wall, eyes dilated, his lip lifted in a snarl of bestial rage.

"I know you now," he muttered savagely. "I know you! You are that young captain—Fortune! Yes, I know you, and by the Torch you shall pay!"

With a fury that staggered Fortune the little goldsmith launched himself against him, hands outstretched to clasp his throat. In the suddenness of his attack he surprised the soldier, and his long nails sank deep in the flesh of Fortune's neck before the stronger man had time to strike.

Fortune's heavy fist caught Kinst in the face, once, twice, blows that were enough to kill a man. The goldsmith released his death grip and fell back, panting and snapping. He foamed at the mouth like some mad dog.

"Stand there and listen!" Fortune ordered, his heavy hand pinning Kinst against the stone wall. "You rat, if I did right I'd kill you for that. You dare! And I was trying to aid you—"

"You!"

"And why not? Do you want your woman back—do you want Anna?"

A glint of low cunning came into Kinst's stare. "If the High-born has Anna—" he began.

Fortune laughed scornfully. "Not I," he declared with a fervor that Kinst recognized as truth. "But, if you are willing to do me a service, Kinst, I can serve you in turn. For a certain favor I am willing to pay high—to pay you with the woman you lost. You like that idea, eh?"

"Where is she?" Kinst muttered.

"Safe enough, never fear. No harm has come to her—and she loves you still."

FORTUNE made this prediction with cheerful certainty. He knew the woman had been imprisoned, and for the rest, he was certain her pallid, plain face, with its red-eyed misery of grief would never catch the fancy of an officer.

"What is it you want with me?" asked the goldsmith sullenly.

"To carry a message, a very secret message, to someone at Wolff's Tower."

"What someone?"

"If I tell you, will you promise to keep my secret? Remember, I can repay you—"

Kinst frowned suspiciously at the bargainer. "What will come of it?" he demanded.

"That is my own affair—not yours."

"Ah!" Kinst's suspicions appeared to have reached proof. "I know," he nodded sagely, "I know! You are plotting treachery—treachery against the Comrades. What are you doing here, you a soldier of Wolff's guard, dressed in that cloth? How does it come you pass among the Comrades and listen to our plans? Now I know! You are a spy—a sneaking, lying spy. I'll denounce you—now."

Fortune merely laughed, and his laugh served the purpose of disarming Kinst.

"By all means, go ahead," he invited. "Tell them what you please—they know all about me already."

"Then—then—" Kinst stammered uncertainly. "I am no traitor to my kind," he protested nervously. "You cannot buy me—no, not even with—with Anna. In pity's name, tell me again she is safe. Tell me!"

Kinst raised his trembling hands in supplication.

"Safe for a few days at least," said Fortune coldly. "I'll not promise she'll be safe long—unless you do my errand."

"And how do I know you'll keep your promise—why should I credit you?"

"You have my word; I do not break my word to any man."

"No." Kinst shook his head stubbornly. "It's some sort of treachery. I'll not do it."

"Very well, you'll never see the woman again. When I return to Manhattan, I'll give her to my soldiers." Fortune turned away.

"Wait, wait—" Kinst started to follow him eagerly.

Fortune secretly breathed a huge sigh of relief. He had found the way!

In his note to Alda, he told her as much as he thought necessary to appeal to her self-interest in bringing about his rescue and no more. Since he had decided definitely against the Comrades and the revolution, he was determined to play his own game for all that was in it.

He realized that if he could escape from the island he possessed a secret that might be valuable. Alda already had hinted that she planned some stroke against the comptroller's power, a plan, Fortune guessed, designed to make her secure in her father's place.

While the Directorate, which consisted of the various administrators of government, followed the formality of electing its Great Towerman, he knew it was influenced by whoever held a balance of power. Frederick was the logical succes-

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sor to Wolff if he could not be checkmated. On second thought Fortune wondered why he had not cast his lot with the mighty comptroller who had so cleverly used his position as administrator of the community wealth to rise higher than any man in government.

But his distrust of Frederick was instinctive. Frederick was a man who played a solitary game, but Alda was a woman, and with all her cleverness she must depend upon men to carry out many of her plans.

It was his intention to make the best possible bargain with Alda and sell her the information about the brewing revolution. She would know best what to do with the secret.

The optimistic young man saw himself rising to a position of enviable power—perhaps the command of the army of the Tower People; perhaps something even more glittering. To be quite frank, he had never forgotten the old children's song about "Fortune the White." His ambition was boundless, and he was sure of himself with the sureness of youth. Might he not some day "rule in might," as the old rhyme predicted?

Certainly he could hope for a richer reward from Alda than from anything that depended on the caprice of the Folk.

As Alda's consort in government he could see himself as a successor to Wolff! The dream was a rosy one, and he thought nothing at all of the misery that would pay for his rise to power.

Only, there was no word from Kinst!

A THOUSAND times a day in those dragging three days of awful waiting he decided bitterly that the little gold worker had betrayed him. As often he renewed his hope in his messenger, sure that Kinst's desire to regain Anna would keep him discreet.

The afternoon of the third day found him desperate. He had risked everything on a single turn of the dice, and the dice delayed their throw until the last second of the last minute—or else already had turned against him.

It was the first day of the month of June, a day that blessed the scarred old earth with the warmth of a lover's kiss. Fortune walked alone on the beach, conscious always that he was watched from a distance, but glad to keep away from Zorn or any who might question him.

At a distance he saw the crooked-backed man Tringe, playing with his kites, and near him the inseparable Shard. He recognized, too, with a sudden start, Mary's plain, gray robe. Conquering his impulse to be near her, he lay on the sand and watched the sky and sea, turning a longing glance toward the ruined walls of old New York not so far away, but still beyond his reach.

To forget Mary he busied his mind with speculations about Alda's plans. Then he became acutely conscious that Mary was walking toward him.

Always this girl walked bareheaded, swinging easilly in strides as long as a boy's and graceful as any beautiful wild animal. The warm sun discovered burnished streaks in her soft, fine brown hair. It ripened her cheeks to a peach bloom. Her shoes of soft leather made no sound in the sand so that she appeared to glide free of the earth.

To Fortune it seemed she moved like splendid music, and all the commonplace and sordid plans he had been making fled at her approach.

When Mary was near he rose to greet her.

"Sit down beside me," Fortune invited. "Help me to bask away these last few hours of freedom. This day is enough to make a contented philosopher even of a condemned man."

Mary's eyes widened with grave concern. "You have decided, then?"

"Not finally." Fortune turned hot and embarrassed at the evasion. It was hard to lie to Mary.

"Zorn has asked for you. He is curious what answer you will give the Comrades."

"Are you curious, Mary? Does it trouble you?"

"I have done all I can to win you to the cause," Mary answered simply. "If I could do more, I would—"

"What, to save my life? Tell me, would you do it to save me from execution?"

Mary looked vaguely troubled. When she answered it was with characteristic honesty. "No, I do not think so—not for that, but we do need a man of your trade and ability—we need you bitterly. Why won't you—no, I promised myself I'd say no more about that!"

"Then if I die to-night you will not be sorry—not even for a minute," exclaimed the young soldier reproachfully. "You will not regret—you will not miss me?"

"Regret? Certainly I will regret."

Mary's grayish-blue eyes met his gaze with perfect frankness. "I will miss you

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more than I can tell, because of our need for you and your work—"

"My work! Will you never forget my work, my trade! Mary, will you never look at me as a man—a man who loves you? For a few minutes will you forget your schemes and your dirty-faced rabble and answer me truly? A month we've walked together and talked together and laughed together. Are you not human? Will you never, for a moment, think sadly of the man who loved you—after he is gone?"

Mary's hands were clasped about one drawn-up knee. Her face was turned away and she seemed to look steadily at the distant city. Fortune studied the profile of cheek eager to guess if it had flushed or if it gave any sign of response to his supplication.

He found time to marvel at the even, creamy brown of her slender neck and slim shoulder where the breeze stirred her robe; to long to touch a feathery wisp of hair that escaped from the knotted mass resting in the hollow at the base of her head.

Mary spoke, her face still averted. "Now, you are thinking only of yourself—I will not tell you."

Despite the words she chose, Fortune was encouraged to plead. "Do you remember how we first met here on this beach? It was almost two years ago, and it seems a lifetime! Do you think I ever forgot that day for one instant?

"I was only out of the cadets' school, on a pleasure voyage, exploring this great bay in my little boat. And I landed here and found you. You were not so cold then!

"I startled you, but we became friends. We laughed together—we got on famously. You remember! Then you warned me to go before I was seen with you—told me never to come back."

"Why did you came back? Mary spoke with face averted.

"As if you didn't know why! Because I never could put you out of my mind one instant.

"Are you heartless? Are you made of stone—I say I love you. If you'll come away with me from this mad place—Mary, if you could pity me! If—"

Now Mary looked at him.

"No, I do not love you. I can't love you—or any man. Listen to me! I have my work to do—yes, it is my work and it means more than my life to me—more than happiness. I could not be happy with you. Until that work is done, until that cause is served to which I have given myself ever since I was old enough to know right from wrong, I will love no man. I will feel for no man nor even think of any man except to turn him to the service of Our Lady of the Torch. Fortune, I want you to understand me—you deserve that much. I would not have you die, I would not have you lost to me forever thinking hardly of me."

MARY rose, and Fortune rose and stood close to her. She regarded him with a grave kindliness. "We must say good-by," she whispered sadly. "I think it will be forever. But I am glad that you spoke again—I am proud you think of me as you do. Just as I am glad—and proud—to serve—to serve—"

"Mary! Mary—"

"Good-by." Impulsively her hand reached out and the fingers rested a second, very lightly, on his cheek. She turned and walked away swiftly. The dignity of her good-by denied him all thought of following—of argument.

Toward evening, as he lounged at the stone parapet that formed the base of the ruined statue, staring into the lazy blue distance without coherent thought, Fortune saw that Zorn stood beside him.

The black-robed recluse observed him sternly. "The time has ended, captain," said Zorn. "You will give us your answer tonight."

"Yes." Fortune nodded. If only he knew

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of Kinst's answer for him—or if Kinst had an answer!

"Well," Zorn insisted, "you have decided?"

"I have decided."

Zorn frowned. "You evade me," he complained. "I do not think you are with us."

Now Fortune saw that he must have every possible advantage to carry out his plan—if the opportunity of that plan was offered. He would not give his word—even to Zorn. But an indirect lie—after all, Zorn was not Mary, he could regard Zorn as an enemy—a man who stood in his way. "I think, then," he said, "that my answer will greatly surprise you. Very greatly."

"Good!" Zorn exclaimed with a sigh of relief. "Then you are with us?"

"I would prefer to explain myself to all the Comrades—"

"Certainly, certainly! Captain, I congratulate you—and the cause, too. I appreciate what we have gained."

"Thank you." Fortune smiled.

"And I was worried because I thought you'd have to die." Zorn laughed. "So Mary has won you? The girl is wonderful!"

"She is marvelous," the soldier agreed with sincere enthusiasm.

The meeting of the Comrades was assembling. Fortune mingled among the crowd that took the benches, searching eagerly for Kinst. At last he saw the goldsmith and grasped him by the arm. "Well?" he questioned sharply.

"Sir," Kinst stammered, "I have an answer, I—"

"What is it, quick?"

"You will not forget your promise? You'll not fail me?"

"I'll get you back your wife; I promise you that."

"When, when?"

"Three days from to-night I'll bring her to your cantonment—"

"No, no! I am going—I have quit that place forever. I am in the secret arsenal of the Comrades. I cannot go back there—"

"Then, you know the little court behind Wolff's Tower. There is a door in the wall—"

"Yes!"

"Be there. Now the answer. Hurry!"

"She bade me say the boat and soldiers will be sent—to-night," whispered Kinst fearfully. "And here, she returns your token, the ring."

The goldsmith pressed into Fortune's hand the gold ring bearing the device of a coiled serpent which he had sent with his message by way of assuring the Highborn.

A wild joy surged over him. He lived again. The future held a rosy promise of adventure and success. As for the Folk and their troubles; as for such things as had troubled his conscience when he looked on them through Mary's eyes—he was quit of them all!

He planned swiftly.

* * *

The Comrades of the Torch had important business to discuss. Plans were complete for assembling a great, secret meeting of all the Folk of the Under City of Manhattan.

"The place is fixed," Zorn announced. "We have chosen a spot in the ruined tunnels on the west side of the island, where there is a great hall left beneath the walls of that huge stone building that once the ancients used for the swift wagons that carried them all about the world.

"Agents from the various cantonments will be prepared to conduct their delegations into the old tunnels at midnight of Sunday, the third day of next month. On the day of rest the vigilance of the guard is much relaxed and there will be less difficulty in assembling. In the early hours of Monday morning we will gather the greatest meeting of the Folk since the days of the Great Catastrophe, and I will be present to explain our plans.

"The day is particularly significant. It will be the fourth of the month of July—a day that in a happier time of the world's history was the sacred anniversary of the birth of freedom on this continent. May we again sanctify it in the cause of human rights!"

A tremendous cheer greeted Zorn's announcement. The delegates shouted and sang in their enthusiasm. The hall fairly trembled with the uproar and the excitement grew intense.

Finally a man—it was the long-haired weaver who had first shouted for Fortune's death—made himself heard above the turmoil.

"Comrades!" he yelled. "Comrades! Where is the man Fortune, Wolff's captain? What of him? It is time he answered us. Bring him out. To-night he must join or die!"

Gradually the sense of his harangue was

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caught up by others. There began a furious clamor for Fortune.

Then they discovered that Fortune was gone. He had disappeared and no man knew when!

When Zorn had finally quieted the insane rage to some semblance of order, men were sent to solve the mystery. After some time they reported.

Outside the door, at the rear of the hall of meeting, a guard was found, dead by strangulation.

On the north beach they discovered the bodies of two of the beach patrol. One still lived. He gasped his testimony of a strange boat that had been seen off the isle; a sudden attack by an armed man identified as Fortune, and the bloody fight that ended when men came ashore from the strange boat and aided Fortune's escape.

There was no more to tell.

CHAPTER V

"THE TORCH WILL BURN AGAIN!"

IN THE recessed doorway of the little court behind Wolff's Tower a man waited in the dark.

He fidgeted impatiently, frequently wringing his hands as he paced the niche; often darting out to look in every direction and as hastily retreating again to his shelter. He moaned in a half articulate monotone that betrayed extreme agitation. He had been waiting there two hours.

The man was Kinst, the little gold worker, Fortune's messenger. He had come for the reward Fortune had promised.

Kinst was fearful of being seen by anybody. A chance encounter with one of the Comrades of the Torch would involve explanations which he dared not make; his discovery by one of Wolff's guard would undoubtedly lead to his arrest as a fugitive from the gold workers' cantonment. He was in a terrible situation with no hope except the promise of a man he knew only as one of Wolff's captains.

"Oh, oh, oh!" he muttered ceaselessly. "He will betray me, I know it! He lied to me! What a fool I've been to trust him. Now I'll be sent to the Drains. Oh, oh, I've betrayed the Comrades—I've lost everything!"

The door against which he leaned with miserable resignation suddenly was pulled inward. Kinst bounded back with a cry of terror.

"Be still—and come in here, quick!"

With a staggering revulsion of feeling the goldsmith recognized the voice as Fortune's. Quick as a rat he scurried into the black court beyond and helped Fortune to shut the big door.

Then Kinst saw another dim shape in the blackness, a muffled, woman's shape that advanced toward him uncertainly and made little moans of joy.

"Anna!" he cried. "It is? It is you, then? Ah, Anna—Anna!" The two figures merged to one. Fortune was left to witness their happiness.

The young captain laughed to himself with a good-natured scorn not unmixed with surprise. This was a funny pair, sure enough!

It was beyond his power to explain the devotion of Kinst to this unprepossessing rag of a woman; or hers to the goldsmith. But anybody could see they loved one another. He reflected on the strangeness of the Folk, who lived like beasts of labor—yes, even looked like beasts—yet found a place somewhere for emotions as human as his own.

Kinst tore himself away from his woman and seized Fortune's hand. He dropped to his knees in the dust and babbled some incoherent nonsense, evidently meant as a protestation of gratitude.

"Come, come, get up," said Fortune. "Get up from that dirt. I said I'd bring you the woman unharmed, and I did—that was our bargain. Don't add all this blubbering."

"I swear it to you, I swear it," Kinst kept insisting. "If ever the High-born needs a friend, I will be his friend. If ever he seeks shelter, or help—"

"You're talking nonsense. What help or shelter have you to offer? Be still—"

"Ah, but you cannot tell, you never know! Some day perhaps it will be my turn to repay. Remember, Kinst is your friend—"

"Very good, I'll remember—" Fortune hesitated. An idea had occurred to him. After all, he might use this Kinst again, if Kinst should prove the proper spirit. Why not; the man was protesting an undying devotion!

"Then listen, since you are grateful," he began. "You are of the Comrades now?"

"Yes, High-born," Kinst whispered.

"You go among them, know their plans, attend the secret meetings?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then if you wish a still greater reward, if you care for presents of gold and want

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to remain my friend, bring to me the news of the revolution. Tell me all they do. I'll reward you generously— What is it?"

Kinst had drawn back strangely.

"No!" he burst out. "No, not for anything you could give me. Not even to save my life, or my woman! I am no spy."

"Yet you just said you would do anything!"

"Not that. You think I have no honor because I am of the Folk? You think I am a traitor, eh? Ah, yes, you think any man of the Folk would sell himself—tell me, would you betray your friends?"

"YOU mangy whelp!" Fortune raised his fist to strike. "You presume to ask that! You—oh, yes, I forgot, you think all men are born equals. Well, you are answered."

"Then," cried Kinst, striking himself a blow on the chest, "I am a man, too! Anything but that, yes! I am no traitor."

"Very well." Fortune shrugged indifferently. "I merely offered you a chance to do better. Let it go. But tell me, Kinst, what do you expect from this crazy revolution? Power? Money? A tower to live in? You're not smart enough—they'll trample you in the crush. Suppose it did succeed—what then?"

"Power? No. Money? No. A tower, no, no!" Kinst spoke with a curious, proud confidence. "But, great sir, when my son is born! He will find a better world. He'll learn the hidden knowledge of the ancients, he'll have his chance with the best of them! Is that nothing to hope for?"

"Oh, hope for it, by all means. You'll never get it. Now be off with you, you and your woman—ah, what's this?"

The door in the wall vibrated to a heavy knocking. "Open in the name of Wolff's guard!" a voice shouted. "Come, quick about it! We saw you go in there, and you're surrounded. Come out!"

"Oh-h-h!" gasped Kinst. "Betrayed! You've tricked me—"

"Shut up, you fool." Fortune seized the gold worker by the arm and shook him harshly. "If I'd betrayed you, d'you think I'd have gone about it this way, without my soldiers? Be still. Here's a fine mess. I can't be found with you—that won't do! Kinst, run, look from the other wall, straight back there, where there's a little gate. If no one is watching it, slip out quick. You can dodge till you escape them."

Kinst sped away with Anna. The knocking continued.

"Hurry!" warned the voice. "We're going to break in, and it will be the worse for you."

The court was walled in on two sides by the ruinous shells of old buildings, crumbling heaps, but with walls too high for a man to climb them in the dark. The other two sides were fenced by masonry, twice as high as a man's head.

He saw that the thing for him to do was to get rid of Kinst and the woman. Fortune hurried to the rear door.

There Kinst and Anna huddled, two figures of stupid dismay. "Ssst!" the gold worker breathed. "Soldiers—against the door, outside!"

Fortune heard a mutter of voices. Pressing his ear against the panel, he listened.

"What'd they turn us out for?" one grumbled.

"Runaway from the Under City," said another.

A third voice added, "Well, let him run! A fine way to use the Tower Guard!"

"I hear it's a gold worker that Wolff has been petting," the first voice began again. "He's been missing, and His Greatness is furious about it. He was seen going in the court to-night—"

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"A fine stir for nothing—hark, they're breaking in the other door. Hear that?" Fortune turned to Kinst. "Do as I say and you'll get away safely," he whispered. "Hide here, just beside this door, until after I've taken that guard away. Then slip out; you won't have much time before they break in from the other side! Back, both of you, deeper in the shadow! That's better, crawl under that stuff!"

Fortune swung the door open sharply. "You men!" he cried. "Tower Guard, eh? Good! This way, and hurry—that little rat went over the wall, yes, up at that far corner. Come—"

"Who are you—wait boys. I don't know what—" One of the soldiers hesitated.

"Come, see my face, my uniform then, but be quick. I'm Fortune, over-captain, police guard, Cantonment Six, and that man's a fugitive from my district."

"Certainly, captain—all right, lads." The suspicious man was satisfied. The three stumbled after Fortune among the ruined walls.

And silent as two shadows, Kinst and his woman slipped through the open gate not more than two minutes ahead of the soldiers who burst into the court from the opposite side.

In a few minutes Fortune dismissed his three soldiers and hurried to another appointment. He had been on Manhattan three days and this was his first opportunity, so busy had Wenn kept him, to see Alda. He had much to tell the High-born.

As he hurried to the rear stairway of Wolff's Tower he mused on his recent adventure with some perplexity.

"A fine thing for me to be doing! If the Towerman knew I'd helped Kinst slip away from his soldiers I'd lose my head quick enough. The little rat is a fugitive from the law, yet here I am aiding him. Well, one must keep a promise."

ALDA, the High-born, leaned among the cushions and studied her grateful young captain with bright eyes. Her pale face was thoughtful because of what Fortune had told her of the Isle of the Great Woman.

Alda was giving all her shrewdness to a veiled appraisal of this very blond soldier who sat so erect among the feminine luxury of her divan. He had proved himself both grateful and loyal. There was also something in his manner and his acts that suggested no unworthy power. She knew his ambition, and she began to believe him perfectly capable of carrying it out. Altogether he seemed just the man she needed in her planning.

Then she recalled that Fortune had gone to the island for the purpose of finding a woman who had caught his fancy. She smiled kindly. "And what of that girl of the Folk you once spoke about? Did you win her, my friend?"

"No," said the soldier briefly.

"She was another's?"

"No, but before I could take her Ham was killed and I was captured."

"And she would not melt to your pleading?"

"No."

She made a mental note that the topic was distasteful to Fortune. The affair of the girl had better be looked into more thoroughly.

"Well, my dear friend, your news is interesting, but after all, the Folk are always plotting an uprising—I scarcely see how—"

"But never such a revolution as this!"

"You think so?"

"I am certain. I tell you, this is organized, thoroughly. Let them go on a month or two longer and—why, I won't answer for any of us. They're not fooling!"

"No, evidently. I am convinced the news is valuable. But just how to use it—"

"High-born, may I suggest—"

"Why, surely, my dear friend! And must you be so formal? Come, you know my name, Fortune! Are we not friends now?"

"I—I don't dare," Fortune stammered uneasily.

"Ah, yes, you dare! Don't I know to my alarm already how far you dare! When you take my hand you frighten me, yet my name—"

"Alda, dear Alda—"

"Ah, that's better. Now, before you go on, let me remind you again. You know my desire? I will rule in Wolff's place when the time comes, or there will no longer be any rule in Manhattan."

Alda's eyes flashed, and she drew herself up proudly. "None of them shall deny me!" she exclaimed. "But when I do rule, Fortune, still I am only a woman—I will need a man's help and advice. And that man, who do you think that man will be?"

"I dare not hope—"

"That man will be the man who helps best to put me in my father's place. That man might well be—you!"

"Now you give me courage for anything!" Fortune exclaimed. He rose and paced nervously. "This is my suggestion.

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You know first of all, about this revolution. It can be ended now, and ended quickly by taking the leaders by surprise—"

"You would attack the isle and wipe out this nest of vermin?" Alda mused.

"No, not that. To attack the isle would not be difficult. Soldiers could be sent over in boats, but if they took every soul on the place there would only be a score, and of them only Zorn would be of consequence—"

"And the girl—that one who took your fancy?" Alda suggested.

Fortune looked secretly uneasy.

"But suppose you did take them," he hurried on. "There is no satisfactory proof of their intention—"

"Proof enough to have them all killed."

"Yes, but not to convince the Tower People and the Directorate as they must be convinced, of your ability to rule! Give the Directorate a demonstration of your foresight. See, the Comrades must finally appeal to the Folk for support. That will mean a meeting somewhere here on Manhattan. When that is held they will all be together. Take officers of the Directorate to the place with you. Let them see and hear for themselves. Then, when you strike, they will understand and applaud you."

"My friend," Alda said shrewdly, "you already know that such a meeting is to be held soon."

"I—I—yes, I do."

"You did not tell me that!"

"No, I did not. I—" Fortune hesitated to tell his reason. Frankly, it was due to a certain hesitancy in revealing the detailed plans of Zorn and Mary. True, he had made no promise of secrecy, yet he felt an obligation. To him the obligation appeared absurd enough, but somewhere within him a conscience was developing, and sometimes it disturbed him with alarming pangs.

Now, he realized, was the time to slaughter this conscience once and for all, at least so far as it concerned itself with Zorn and Mary and the Folk. Before his eyes had been dangled a prize beyond his rosiest hope; and the spell of Alda had enmeshed him. "Win!" counseled his mind. "Strike boldly. Take everything; Alda and power for your satisfaction, and Mary for your love. Be bold."

"But I know their plans," he completed his sentence. "A great meeting in the ruined tunnels will be held the fourth day of next month. Zorn will be there—all of them! And the Folk will be there, practically every soul in the Under City. Strike then! Strike quickly, take them by surprise, put this rebellion down, and your power is certain. The Directorate cannot deny you. Frederick will have no hand in this."

"Yes," Alda nodded. "You are right. I will tell Wolff—oh, of course, he must be told! He has the power now. It must be done in his name. But, as you say, the credit will be ours. It can be managed in such a way that Frederick will know nothing until he hears we have won. The Directorate will not dare deny us then, when we have proved our power to rule!"

"Shall you tell Wolff?"

"No, we two. We're comrades now, we'll act together. You are sure of your information?"

"Absolutely."

"Then we'll lose no time about it. To-night—"

"To-night!" Fortune could not have explained why he shrank from the final act. Probably that troublesome conscience was not yet thoroughly drugged—and yet the affairs of the Folk were no affairs of his.

They went to Wolff. Fortune retold his story of the revolution and Alda made her argument. Pale morning was revealing the ruined walls of ancient New York when Fortune left Wolff's Tower.

Although he had reached almost in one stride the goal he had scarcely dared dream he would ever attain, he felt no elation. He was very tired. Toward the Great Towerman, who had revealed in this crisis of government so much of the indecision that was fatal to his success, Fortune felt only peevish contempt. For Alda, who had twisted her father skillfully to her own purpose he had a certain respect based on fear.

In that gray morning all of Alda's charm had vanished from memory. He saw only an ambitious and resourceful woman whose promises he must accept at face value; who must be watched always.

And of himself, Fortune had, somehow, a poor opinion, indeed.

SOMETHING was winging through the Under City of Manhattan—something intangible yet more potent than Wolff's guard; fragile as gossamer yet everlasting as the stream of human life. It passed from lip to lip, and it brightened dull eyes and acted on men like strong drink; still it had no substance except in the mind. It was hope.

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An immortal idea, never dead though long forgotten, had come to rebirth. It brought light in the blackest midnight of civilization, and wherever the Folk heard its name, life took on a new meaning. Tomorrow loomed through the gray desolation of their days as a golden promise.

In these curious, underground trainways that honeycombed the island, beneath the crumbling walls of old New York, and under the jungles where only wild beasts moved, there were more than a score of such cantonments as that which Fortune ruled. They had been purposely isolated by walling in the old holes so that one group of the Tower People's slaves was ignorant of the life of another.

Yet the whispering penetrated everywhere. Masonry walls were no barrier. The guards of the Under City, alert to check anything that promised trouble, could not stop it—did not even discern this new menace.

Through the blind and foul old bores, almost impassable from falls of earth, poisonous with the pocketed air of ages, seeping through the Directorate's barriers like the water that eternally dripped from the free air above, passed the word inspired by Zorn, the recluse, from his shelter in the ruined figure of the Great Woman.

The Torch will burn again!

The weavers heard it, and their dull eyes lighted and their pale cheeks flushed. Laborers staggering like laden beasts under the weight of the bales and beams they bore, turned their faces upward and breathed deeper as if they already sniffed free air. Smiths beating the molten metal discovered a new significance to their labors.

In the cantonment of the masons, one night late in June, a draggled, weary woman sat close by the family fire, a half-dozen undersized children pressed about her. She was no beautiful picture, this sallow-faced woman with stringy hair, prematurely aged by her privations, ruling with a harsh hand and waspish voice the pallid-faced, unattractive cubs who fought around her.

Nor did her brood, not even the smallest, possess that young, animal grace that is the charm of babyhood. The struggle for survival had robbed them of birthright. Their eyes were large and glittering and ringed by black circles that told of undernourishment. Their cheeks were pinched, their faces wrinkled.

Though somewhere above their heads there was free air, warm and fragrant with coming summer, in the cantonment the fire was always welcome, for these clammy walls forever held the cold.

It was the whining demand of a boy of seven who pressed against her knee that brought a rapt, docile silence to the snapping, whimpering cubs. "I want to hear the story," he insisted. "Tell us the story again! Tell us about when the Torch will burn."

With a heavy sigh at the mockery of it, the woman began. The small heads pressed close about her, to catch every word of her poor imaginings. Now and again a shrill voice, held to a fearful whisper—for such things were forbidden by the police of the Under City—made a querulous correction in the familiar tale.

For generations this was a common scene—a scene as homely as a mother putting her infant to sleep. In such places as these, among such groups, the idea had renewed its life and passed from one age to another, a fantastic, distorted fairy tale believed by the eager minds of children, scoffed at in their later years, yet saved to tell again to their children. No man could have told why it lived or how. We only know that hope dies hard.

Even while the little group listened the man of that family had collected a dozen of his fellows about him, off in a corner where they could whisper unheard. He was a bowed and shuffling figure, with a hairy face that had been blotched with frequent accretions of mortar into strange, white spots that contrasted with its general dirt. His eyes were little and sunken, and the rims were red from the constant irritation of lime.

Rubbing his wrinkled hands until the dry, leathery skin threw off a little cloud of white dust, he fumbled inside his smock and produced a small, metal object held with awkward care. Slowly it passed from one calloused hand to another while his companions peered and grunted.

"You all see, hey? You see what it is?" the owner of the object whispered harshly.

"H-m, not I!" one insisted who was half blind. He held his cupped hand close before his eyes and peered harder at what he held.

"You fool," chuckled another, " 'tis the Torch. Bah, the man's blind—"

"No, no!" the near-sighted man grumbled. "Now I make it out. So it is; so it is! The Torch made of gold, too. Hah, Murph, you stole it?"

"I did not," Murph denied hotly. "Don't

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I know the penalty for looting in the ruins? Well, of course! No, it's far stranger than that. Listen, boys—come closer!

"THIS afternoon while we were all busy on that new wall near Frederick's tower," Murph went on eagerly, "about midway to evening, our guard got drowsy with the warm air and stretched himself behind a stone pile, well out of sight of his captain, you may be sure!

"None of the rest of the lads noticed it; but I did, and don't you forget! Poor fools, they're stronger than I, and they slaved away like ants in that blazing sun; but wise old Murph, who'd got misery in his bones, but a sharp eye in his head, keeps his eye on the guard.

"So I slowed down and slowed down, and got a couple minutes to sniff the air and stretch my old back. Then, to get a rest I made up an errand for more mortar—you lads know how it is! So I climbed down from my wall and scuffed along toward the mixers, keeping an eye on my guard all the time. And in a deep corner I met a man. 'Oh-o!' says I. 'You're a stranger, eh?' He was dressed like us boys, but he wasn't any fellow I ever saw.

"He beckoned me closer. 'Here,' he says, 'see this? You know what it is?'

"'Do I know it!' says I. 'So does every kid in the Under City know it so well he'd recognize it anywhere. But you'd better look sharp, friend, and put it away. You know what the Tower People will do if they find it on you!'

"'Take it,' says he, 'keep it, and show it to your comrades in the cantonment. Tell them from me it is a sign they will some day rise and seize their freedom.'

"'And who are you?' says I. 'A Comrade of the Torch,' he answered me; 'you will hear more of us later. In a few days I will see you here again and bring you news of the great meeting the Folk are planning, the meeting to arrange their arming against the Tower People. Meantime tell your fellows what I say to you. Don't despair, for I promise you the day is coming. And, above all things,' says he, very particular, 'make no attempt at revolt until you get the word. If you betray our secret you betray yourself as well. Be careful!'

"He motioned me to go on about my business. I looked back in a moment and he was gone."

That same night the mason told his story, while the whispering ran through all the city and penetrated even to the dismal prisons in the Drains, where men shivered and scratched at the vermin and hoped dully for death to end their suffering—that same night in which the Tower People went about their affairs, happy in their stolen ease—Kinst, the little goldsmith, and his woman, Anna, entertained guests in the secret arsenal of the Comrades.

This arsenal was hidden in one of the blind and shut-off tunnels. Its entrance was a secret guarded religiously by those few of the Folk who knew. Those who came followed a dark and dangerous path,

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that climbed sometimes roof-high over fallen débris; that led them through deep and slimy pools and among black pockets where the squealing rats became an actual menace to any man that dared linger.

But finally this path opened on a wider hole, a part of the ancient subways in fair preservation. Here, in the past, two tunnels had branched and in the crotch of their branching there stood a curious, three-cornered house of masonry. In its day it must have served in the complicated operation of the old system of trains; now it was the home of Kinst, and the office of the arsenal.

A bright, red glow shone from its underground windows and within the place was warm, for Kinst's furnace was burning red at the urging of his bellows.

Close by a dim lamp crouched the woman Anna, stitching with untiring fingers, as women of all ages have sat and stitched, turning her eyes frequently to her man, sweating and red-faced as he watched his coals and the molten metals in his little crucible.

And before the furnace, where it could bask in the glow, stretched a cat. It was a curious, half-wild animal that had come to live with Kinst and his woman, such a cat as one still sees rarely in forlorn places, a pariah of a once proud strain. It was a dirty yellow in color. Its head was small and flat, with a wicked, crafty mask of face. Its body was powerful, and it was savage in disposition.

There had just joined this domestic group two visitors, one the giant Shard, who stood with head bent forward to avoid hitting the low ceiling, grinning good-naturedly at the fire; the other Tringe, the crooked-backed man. Tringe's keen eyes were intent with professional interest on Kinst's metal and the furnace.

"There," sighed Kinst finally, "I can pour. This will make twenty more of the little torches—we're spreading the light, eh, comrades?"

"Ho-ho, spread the light, that's it!" Shard approved boisterously, and his huge voice sent the cat snarling into the shadow. "Aye, spread the light. They're tiny, but Folk can see by them."

"Yes, they're going everywhere," Tringe mused complacently. "Every cantonment must have received at least one by now. I tell you, the Folk are beginning to buzz!"

Kinst fluttered anxiously about his molds. The stench of hot metal and burning grease rose thick. Finally the gold worker turned on them.

"At last, that's done. Now, Tringe, let us see that blessed flag Mary has sent us. Anna, look well. Here's your task!"

"Yes, it's made by Mary's own hands," Tringe boasted eagerly as he took a roll of silk from under his jacket. "Every stitch of it blessed by her love. Look!"

ALL eyes turned on the fluttering silk he held high, releasing its folds until it was revealed, a brave banner. The field was half white, half blue, and thrusting across it diagonally was a hand that bore a flaming torch—this was red.

"The banner that will lead us to freedom!" cried Tringe, his voice shrill with pride and excitement.

"You can make others like it, you can?" Kinst spoke huskily to Anna.

"Yes, yes—with the cloth given me. All you wish. Ah, dear gods, how happy I'll be at this task!"

Even Anna's plain face seemed to borrow a momentary beauty from something fine within her.

"Hey, that's so, how about the silks?" Shard exclaimed.

"Solf, the weaver is bringing them—stolen from Wolff's own stores," Tringe explained.

"Yes, and Solf is here." The door had opened as Tringe spoke to admit the long-haired weaver who bore more rolls of silk.

"Ah, here's still another come in. Hello, Gross, more shields to-night?"

"Spear-heads and six swords," answered Gross, the sooty-faced armorer. "The piles grow, eh, Kinst?"

"The day comes soon enough," Shard growled anxiously.

"But the Folk will be ready!" It was Kinst who measured them.

"Yes, yes, they'll fight," Gross agreed. "Give us men to lead them well and that banner there will float from Wolff's Tower."

"May it be soon!" Tringe exclaimed.

"And what a day it will be," declared the weaver ecstatically. "I don't mind saying I've got my eye already on a certain tower where the loot is going to make a rich man of me—"

"No better than mine, the place I choose," chuckled the armorer. "There's fine stuff there will be ready for the taking—and a certain woman, a High-born, mind you. I've marked her for mine—"

"No looting," murmured Tringe, shaking his head. "Let the Folk dispose. There must be government—"

Kinst nodded sagely.

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"Well, government surely," the weaver agreed. "That's all right, and none will obey quicker than I, but meantime, for that little space when the Tower People go down and the air is filled with the dust of their fall—ah, a wise man can do much then!"

"I know one wise man who can," the armorer agreed, laughing.

"I don't like that weaver, nor that armorer. They talk too much of looting." Shard made his complaint to Tringe as they were taking their way back to the Isle of the Great Woman.

"Nor I," Tringe agreed. "Yet where there are many men you'll find many notions. Freedom! None of us quite agree what it will bring, my friend. One talks of taking a tower for his own; another of drinking all the wine he can hold; another of a woman. Kinst sees his son born into a better world; you grumble about a field to plant and have for your own; and I? Well, I'm not sure just what I'll have—a better place to put my workshop, I think. None of us see the thing alike—"

"Will we ever agree, then?" the giant gloomed.

"No, but there's one blessing on our cause—"

"And that?"

"A man to lead us wise enough to choose the right path and strong enough to keep our feet from straying—we have Zorn."

"Gods be thanked."

"Amen to that," nodded Tringe.

* * *

So the month of June passed on.

The Directorate buzzed with secret activity. Wolff's adherents and powerful friends met in counsel, and preparations began to gather the armed forces necessary to check rebellion.

Alda's white cheeks began to borrow the color of excitement as she planned and directed in anticipation of triumph.

And in the tunnels of the Upper City, wherever the Folk gathered by night, sped the whispers of hope.

June ended and July came in. With it came definite word of the great meeting. From mouth to mouth instructions passed. Men were named to lead the delegations to the secret place chosen by Zorn.

From hand to hand passed the little metal torches Kinst was fashioning, talismans of freedom. And wherever they passed they kindled a spark in hearts long cold. Men were ready now to believe.

After generations of darkness; when the dream itself had almost passed; emerging from the mists that veiled the time before the Great Catastrophe, came the Torch.

The fabled symbol of freedom—the symbol that legend said once was held aloft by the Great Woman of the Isle, had returned to despondent men.

The Torch would burn!

Already thousands of eager eyes watched for its flame.

CHAPTER VI

THE BLACK MORNING

ON THE West Side of Manhattan, in what must have been in its time the most crowded district of the ancient New York, stood a huge ruin of gray stone, almost entirely obliterated by the jungle growth. It had been one of the great train stations of the ancients.

Against this massive structure, built so that it would seem that time itself could not harm it, the Great Catastrophe had shown a violent spite so that its mighty pillars lay toppled and buried under rank forest growth; its courts and halls stood open to the sky in a weedy desolation, and only wild animals sought it for shelter.

And for a mile all about the spot the forest grew thick, and the ancient pomp and circumstance of civilization had been leveled.

But beneath the earth the old station was little harmed. Platforms of great length where the electric trains common before the Great Catastrophe had taken and discharged their millions of passengers, still existed, and, opening on these, the old tunnels that honeycombed the island.

This underground refuge was known to a few of the Folk who had fled to the abandoned subways to escape slavery. The morning of the first Sunday of July it was occupied by about one hundred of the Comrades of the Torch. They had selected a place for the meeting of the Folk, a hall of tremendous width and breadth, from one end of which a great stairway ascended to the ruins above. This had been made ready, in a rude way, for the assembling of the great crowd.

There were vast piles of torches gathered, and a multitude of lamps. The wide stairway had been chosen as a stage, and this was dressed in silks of red, white, and blue. Suspended from above, half-way of the height of the stair, and serving as a

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background, was the flag of the revolution, a larger banner copied from the original made by Mary.

All these preparations had been finished. Interest now centered about a lighted space where Tringe squatted, bent over lists written on paper. One at a time the crooked-backed man was identifying the guides chosen to bring the Folk through the secret tunnels, and issuing to them their final instructions.

"That's the last," said Tringe finally, nodding his great head with satisfaction. "Twenty-five cantonments accounted for. Each man will bring half the strength of his own place. That should make, roughly, fifteen—no, closer to twenty thousand of the Folk. Think of it, twenty thousand!

"You understand, all of you, each is to choose the ablest and the strongest? Leave women and children behind, and bring only your best. Now slip back to your own places and remember, each must start his delegation in time to arrive here the second hour after midnight. Off with you!"

"It will succeed?" questioned the gigantic Shard. "You think it can be done, comrade?"

"Why not!" Tringe shrugged. "It's simple enough for a child to understand. Now you, Shard, you'd better be getting back to the isle with your picked men. You've a task of your own—to bring Zorn and Mary safely here at the hour. You can't afford to fail us."

"I'm off, off directly," Shard agreed. He shook himself briskly, like a great dog. "Gods!" he exclaimed, his little eyes glowing. "To think I should live to see this day! If only we can trust the Folk—"

"We must trust them—it is their cause," Tringe answered solemnly.

AN HOUR or so after this interview, Solf, the weaver, appeared unobtrusively among the Folk of his cantonment. Absent-mindedly, he brushed from his blue smock spots of muddy water and streaks of dirt.

His appearance was the signal for many curious, eager looks from his fellows. The secret now was common property. Men knew where Solf had been.

One or two bolder ones tried to question him, but these Solf discouraged. They must not be seen whispering.

So Solf strolled with elaborate unconcern to his own particular niche beneath an arch, and stretched himself on his pile of rags as if to sleep. As he did so a soldier who had been watching from a distance slipped quietly away through the shadows to rejoin three comrades of the guard. "Come." He nodded to them. "He's away from the common fire now, and this is our chance. Remember the orders—no noise, and, if we can help it, we must not be seen!"

Thus it happened that Solf, the weaver, stricken dumb with terror and doubly insured against giving alarm by a gag tied between his jaws, was quietly spirited from his couch and taken from the Under City.

The weaver's pasty face was a mask of abject fright when he found the soldiers were taking him to Wolff's Tower. The men who brought him had to support his weight as they dragged him and pushed him along corridors and up stairs. When they reached the place they had been ordered to bring their prisoner they vented their relief by hurling him bodily to the hard floor.

Solf looked up fearfully into the face of Over-captain Fortune. A moment later another joined the young captain, a white-faced woman whose hair was copper hued, clad in a twining gown of brilliant, changeable green silk. She eyed the shaking weaver with a hard contempt.

"This is the man?" questioned Alda.

"This is the man. Here, one of you guards, cut that rag that ties his jaws."

The gag was taken from Solf's mouth. His hands were untied. He rubbed his throat and waggled his jaw, but he did not dare rise in the presence of these Tower People.

"Here, weaver, look—and listen to me." Fortune took up a heavy sack and untied its mouth. He poured into his hand a golden stream of coins—the coin used by the Tower People. He jingled them delectably. "Look," he said, "the sack is full. See how heavy it is!"

Solf left off rubbing his jaws and stared. A hard, cunning look came into his glittering eyes.

"Here, in this sack, is the worth of a tower," Fortune went on. "There's enough to make any man rich for life. Now, listen, you dog. You've been licking your lips thinking about the loot you'll take when the Folk rise—oh, we know, we know! D'you think we did not know all the time the plans and plots you were making?

"Well, here's loot enough to make any comrade's heart glad. And down there at the tower entrance is a great, wooden door. You've seen that, have you? Tell

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me, did you ever see a man nailed against a door like that, hands and feet spread wide with great spikes driven through his flesh—dying slowly, miserably? Ah, you have! Well, Solf, you're lucky this time, for I'm going to give you your choice: tell us what you know, and you'll be rich; refuse and you die.

"Which will it be, money or the door?"

Solf had no answer to give. He continued to grovel and stare, his mouth hanging open.

"Answer," Fortune insisted, "which will it be?" Still the weaver sat dumb.

Fortune beckoned to his soldiers. "Take this man to the great door—nail him up," he ordered.

Solf threw himself, shrieking, upon the floor. "Wait, wait," he babbled, "no, I'll do it—I'll tell it—anything, whatever you wish. Let me speak—speak—"

"Very well." Fortune waved the guard back. "Now, lose no time answering me after this. About that meeting of the Folk early to-morrow morning: How do they go? At what hour? How many? Tell me the plan entire. And remember, we already have the story, so if you lie to us—"

"I will. I'll tell the truth, all of it," Solf gulped. "Listen, I'll give every detail, but —give me my money."

Fortune shoved the heavy sack at the weaver with his foot. "You soldiers," he ordered, "wait just outside the door, in easy call, and one of you inform Supreme Commander Wenn that we are awaiting him here."

SHORTLY after midnight, throughout the Under City, began a stealthy movement. Silent groups of men assembled in shadowy corners. Everywhere there was a faint stirring and whispering, and the thrill of suppressed excitement.

Unchallenged by any police guards, these groups began to move into the tunnels, each guided by one or more men who knew the secret paths. The gloom of the old bores swallowed them up, and those who stayed at home muttered prayers to speed their steps and bring them safely back again with news of the Torch.

That night the abandoned tunnels swarmed with the men in blue denim. Silent companies, they passed slowly, fearfully under Manhattan byways that were strange, until they came to the brightly lighted place of assembly and crowded slowly into the great hall beneath the ruins.

And as each company moved through the tunnel entrances into the hall the leaders, had they thought to count heads, would have found its numbers increased by almost half.

Had they looked, these leaders would have discovered strange faces—the faces

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of soldiers of the Tower People covered in the universal blue uniform of servitude, worn over their chain mail.

While the Folk assembled, crowding to their places about the great stair where Zorn was to appear with the word they waited, these soldiers lingered in the shadows, each group closing one of the exits of that strange meeting-place.

It was at midnight, too, that Fredericks the comptroller was summoned to Wolff's Tower. There he found the assembled Directorate and heard from the smiling lips of the Towerman news that made him gnaw his beard with vexation.

The Red Fox saw that his ignorance of this menace to Tower rule had discredited him.

The humiliating discovery was to find a woman had outwitted him. But when he learned, as he soon did, that Alda was advised and guided by Fortune, the comptroller's annoyance turned to cold and calculating anger.

Like the Folk, that brilliant assembly of armed men and their soldiers got into motion promptly. Guides led them through the forests and among forgotten ruins of dead New York. It was a weird and fearsome journey by which this little group of officials of the Tower People came at length to the rendezvous of the Folk.

Eventually they found themselves ensconced in the shadow of a little balcony that overlooked the lighted hall beneath, witnesses to the drama which, to all but a half-dozen, was news of most alarming import.

In the front rank of that awed little group of witnesses were Alda, Fortune, and Frederick. Their balcony was not more than fifteen feet above the heads of the crowd that waited below, and not a dozen feet from the great stair where the banner of revolt rippled lazily and the stage awaited the entrance of its chief actors, yet so inadequate were all the torches to lighten the gloom of the vast hall that they could peer from the shadows unseen.

From the crowding Folk there rose a low buzz of sound. Caution and the habit of years suppressed their noise. They waited, eager, half afraid, puzzled for whatever was to happen.

Back into the dim shadows their ranks extended, solid like a carpet of blue stippled with white faces. Where torches flared little circles of light fell in ruddier glow on their compact bodies, patterning the vast mass like some strange tapestry.

The wide spaces of the ruin vibrated to one low, whispering chord, the exhalation of thousands of throats—a chord that thrilled the soul of a listener with the intoxication of excitement.

Already the Folk were tasting freedom.

The flag on the stair was swept aside and a vast sigh rose from the crowd.

A tall, spare figure in black, gray-haired, lean, ascetic, walked forward into the full glow of the torches. Zorn, the Recluse, stood surveying the people to whose salvation he had devoted the best of his life. To most of the multitude Zorn was entirely a stranger. They had never heard his name, yet the eyes that stared on him recognized instinctively that here stood their leader. Zorn's was a power instantly felt.

A few paces behind Zorn advanced a slender, youthful figure in gray, a woman whose beauty seemed supernatural in the glow of light that flooded her. She walked bareheaded, erect, free of motion, with the dignity of the highest-born and the innocent grace of fine and trusting young womanhood.

Men paid her homage unconsciously. A long drawn "ah-h!" greeted her entry.

Fortune pressed forward from the balcony, staring his eyes out. His lean jaw tightened with excitement. A heightened color flooded his cheek. His wide eyes glowed darkly.

Alda, pressed beside him, whispered, "So that is the girl, my friend! That is the girl of the Folk?"

The question was unanswered. Fortune had not heard it.

But Frederick, on her right, was staring, too. He shook off his glance at last and his eyes met Alda's.

"You saw, too?" he muttered. "You saw! What a woman it is—what a woman! To have her a man would give—everything. Even I, old as I am—"

Alda bit her lip in vexation. She was accustomed to holding all eyes, and the unconscious sincerity of both men annoyed her sharply. She glanced again at Fortune's rapt face and became engrossed in her own thoughts.

BEHIND Zorn and Mary there now appeared a half-dozen Comrades of the Torch, who bore arms. And with them were Shard the giant, and Tringe, the misshapen little man whose ugly face leered down upon the crowd in triumph.

Zorn's upraised hand brought silence to the staring throng. The last whispers

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died away under the low arches. Men waited the word.

Zorn spoke. His voice had a musical vibration, deep-pitched, that carried it far:

"Men of the Folk, I come before you in the name of that freedom that is your birthright—that freedom of which you have been shamefully robbed. You have been brought here by the Comrades of the Torch that you may learn what are your rights and how you may take them from the Tower People who have stolen them. The hour has come to strike—"

A tremendous shout drowned out Zorn's voice. It came spontaneously from the thousands who had dreamed all their days of this hour, dreamed without daring to hope it would come to them. It was such a shout as to sweep back the little group in the balcony as if its noise had been tangible, and could bowl them down.

It did not die instantly, but rose and fell in a long, wavering succession of cheering that swept, echoing, out through ruined passages and tunnels as if it would flood every nook and niche of all the Under City.

Fortune found his arm grasped tight by Wolff himself. The Great Towerman clung to him like a terrified child. Unconsciously he tried to shrug from that clutch.

"Hark!" he shouted rudely at Wolff's ear. "Listen now—listen! The bugles!"

Piercing the dying clamor came a new note, high-pitched, metallic, triumphant—the fanfare of trumpets!

Insistent, compelling above all other noise the shrill, strident call of the trumpets rose in ecstasy, and as ears comprehended the menace of this new sound, a terrible silence fluttered down.

Then the rattle of steel.

The banner of the revolution was snatched away in a flash and down the great stair charged soldiers of the Tower People with drawn swords.

And at the same time, from every corner, swords were flashing while armed men advanced.

Dumb with terror, milling in a vast, swirling confusion like frightened cattle, packed in to suffocation and helpless, the Folk found themselves surrounded—betrayed.

A bellow of insane fury drew all eyes to the stair. Unarmed, leading that pitiful knot that guarded Zorn and Mary, Shard had sprung to meet the advancing soldiers.

The first man he charged low and his great arms seized his legs below the thighs. The soldier was swept high in Shard's arms, face agape, swung in a great arc and sent hurtling into the packed mass below.

With a yell and clatter the soldier's comrades leaped to the fight. A furious knot of them struggled about the raging giant. Another body flew high over their heads and down the stair.

About Shard men fell to right and left and some of them did not rise again.

"Look, look!" Wolff shrilled in Fortune's ear. "They've got him—that black-robed man. They've got Zorn—no, oh, gods! Yes, yes, see—now he's fast!"

"And the woman—the girl!" Frederick shouted. "Now they're taking her down the stair—"

"Yes, and Zorn, too. They're bringing them this way—see the Folk fall back out of their way. The dogs, they'll bark no more at my soldiers."

Wolff was leaning now far from the balcony.

"That giant, he's broken through. He's gone," Alda was crying. "And that crooked little man—I saw him dart away, crawling under a man's legs. Ah, look, Fortune, they're bringing the girl this way—see, there goes your dear love!"

Now Fortune thrust aside Wolff and Frederick and peered down. A knot of soldiers had struggled down the stair and was moving slowly below them. In their midst he saw Mary. Of all that mad throng she was serene.

She held her head high and she looked about her fearlessly. Her face was pale, but beautiful with a courage that glowed.

Fortune stared on her and a sob choked in his throat.

This was his doing. He had brought Mary to this!

His sob translated abruptly into a gasp. His gray eyes widened and turned suddenly black with rage.

A choking cry burst from his lips. "You filthy devil—you dare strike her. I'll—"

The threat dissolved in sudden action. In a flash he crowded back those about him. He had hurled himself from the balcony before they realized.

Staring down they saw the armed group dissolve with his fall. The soldier who had struck Mary was among those downed. Before he could rise Fortune's sword had pierced his body.

Then the young captain wheeled on the man's startled companions. At his word of command they closed about Mary and moved away.

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ACTING according to prearranged plan, Wolff's soldiers struck quickly and with organized effectiveness. In a few minutes excitement had quieted. The Folk found themselves deprived of their leaders and the packed thousands huddled, uncertain what to do.

The glorious morning that had been Zorn's life ambition had dawned black. The thing men had dreamed of all their days and longed for with the bitter longing of despair had lingered a second within their grasp, only to vanish like all their dreams—dissolving into the harsh reality of life as it was.

Had this multitude been left long idle, in its present state of mind it might have acted in some manner; undoubtedly it would have acted. But the clever planning of Alda had foreseen this moment.

When the arrests had been completed and the soldiers thus engaged were gone the return of quiet was again interrupted by the bugles. Now they shrieked and blared their triumph, and down the stair where the banner of the Torch lay trampled and still bodies huddled like heaps of rags, through blood and litter, came a score of musicians in the flaming red of Wolff's livery. Behind these moved an armed guard in glittering array, and after them Wolff himself, Alda on one side, and Frederick, alert to take what advantage he could of events, walking at his left.

Compared to that black-robed man who had so recently moved in silent dignity along that same striking perspective, the Great Towerman cut a poor figure. His slight form, for all its splendid yellow robe, glittering with trappings now revealed by discarding his cloak, advanced hesitantly, half fearfully. His pale face, with curling black hair and dandified beard framing its vacuity, suggested more of mean, gloating triumph than right justified.

Wolff suffered, too, in comparison with his companions. Alda moved always with a queenly air, insolent, powerful, and sure. Frederick's great body was held in military pomp. The robust comptroller was the pattern of a man always to appear well in public.

After this trio followed the various directors of government, the hated officials of the Tower People, and behind them more soldiers.

Finally came several servants with a great flag. In a brief time they had made fast this banner to the same tackle that had lifted the banner of freedom, and its crimson folds rose slowly, displaying the brilliant red field with the golden tower, symbol of Wolff's authority.

The trumpets ceased their bragging march. The Great Towerman stepped forward until he stood out alone, ahead of all his company. He had no need to invoke silence. The silence was oppressive. No word was spoken, but from the lips of the Folk came an elusive ghost of a sound, a faint and sustained hissing that spoke their terrible hatred.

Wolff hesitated, his head cocked to one side, his white, slim hands combing nervously at his little beard. He began to speak abruptly in that habitual whining, shrill voice that grew in volume as his assurance grew.

"Folk of the Under City, you have done ill. You have defied the government divinely ordained to protect your welfare. The gods are displeased, and they have brought ruin to your foolish planning.

"The Directorate is grieved at your madness," Wolff whined reprovingly. "If anything is wrong, if injustice has been done you, our benevolent system of government gives you easy means to seek correction. Every man, woman, and child among you has the right to bring his grievance before me, by means of the police of the Under City. They are my ordained agents of justice.

"But you thought to defy me." Wolff's tone grew querulous, then angry. "You thought to throw down those who guard you, who guide you. There is wicked murder in your hearts. You dare defy the will of Divinity itself. Ay, you would gladly kill me. I know!

"Now you must do penance.

"Those persons who have dared put murder in your hearts are in my prisons. They will pay for this. And so shall you all!

"Listen to the judgment of Wolff. This is my will that you shall do:

"For three days the Tower People will deprive every man, woman, and child of the Under City of work. You shall sit idle. Ay, and you'll go hungry, for do not the laws say that he who does no work shall not be fed?

"That is the penance you shall do for this night. It is not all. Later the Directorate will publish its will concerning other privileges you must give up. Don't think to escape unscathed.

"Now go you back to your cantonments. Soldiers, see that my will is done. Later the Under City shall see what comes to

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those who dared preach sedition in Manhattan!"

Wolff raised his right hand high above his head and unconsciously the fist doubled in a gesture of menace. "Back with you!" he shouted with all the power of his cracking voice. "Go back!"

He turned and hastily rejoined his companions. The soldiers closed in ahead and behind him. The great flag was swept aside, and he disappeared up the stair.

Then from every corner of the vast hall came the harsh commands of the armed men. Every soldier of the Tower People who could possibly be spared was there, perhaps six or seven thousand of them in all.

The confusion was terrible, but there was little resistance, for those who complained were punished with swift death.

Long hours elapsed before the last stragglers were herded into the underground passages. In the free world above the sun was long past noon before the melancholy processions underground had ended.

In bitter humility the men who once dared to hope were driven back to their cold kennels. The flame that had promised to warm their lives and light their steps toward freedom was quenched in birth. Their wrists still galled with the metal bracelets of slavery and their eyes were dull with apathetic despair.

The promise had failed.

WITH a deadly suddenness that assured his authority, Fortune had taken command of the knot of soldiers who held Mary. He led them from the underground hall along old passages that were cold with the breath of the ruins.

They traversed strange places and their torches frightened bats and small bird life and sent the hungry rats scurrying. It was fully a quarter of an hour before the captain began to plan. His first insane fury passed. Now that he had saved Mary from rough treatment, what to do with her?

A sifting of gray light down a stair suggested an exit from underground. He led the little company upward. They came out into a vast, roofless space heaped high with the débris of the old train station. After several false starts they found a way through this labyrinth of broken stone blocks and vine-hung arches into the forest. The night sky was paling before the approaching sun.

Up to now Fortune had spoken no word to Mary. He had avoided her glances. Impelled by necessity, he addressed her with averted looks.

"Our way through the forest will be hard and long. Can you walk? If you would rather, two of the men can carry you."

"I can walk."

Her tone was neither cold nor reproachful, as he had feared. She answered him as one would address a stranger, without interest of any sort.

"Very well," he agreed. "March, men!" This was no place to discuss their relations.

Three hours later, in the fresh morning of a splendid July day, they quit the jungle and found again the open streets. A soldier, mounted, passed near them. Fortune ordered him from the horse and commandeered it for his prisoner. For a moment, as he helped Mary to mount, her hand touched his. It was ice-cold.

What to do with Mary he had but a faint idea. He was acting entirely on his own responsibility, actuated by private emotions for which, no doubt, he would later have to make explanations to his superiors.

But on one point he was determined—they should not put this girl into any of the terrible prisons kept for the Folk!

Fortune thought hard as he led his little company. If he would save Mary from the very real and terrible dangers of incarceration in the Towerman's prisons, he must imprison her in some place of his own. He had no p[illegible]n!

But he had Mary, and he did not intend to lose her—at least, until he had time to persuade her that the cause of the Comrades was lost and she could do no better than to accept his love.

He decided that the girl could be kept in the cantonment of the Under City where he ruled the guard. And scarcely had he made the decision before chance took the matter out of his hands.

They had reached the Towerman's Road, threading their way through the ruins along a path known as "The Canal," a title that traced its origin to an old street before the Great Catastrophe. As they turned into the broader way they met a brilliant cavalcade of Tower People, at their head Alda, Frederick, and Wolff.

Fortune would have given his captain's rank to have avoided this!

His frantic hope of passing unnoticed failed miserably. The voice of the Towerman stopped them and Wolff rode close to gloat over the fair prisoner.

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Alda, watching from a little farther off, showed traces of emotion. The High-born was actually jealous of a girl of the Folk who had drawn Fortune from her side!

Frederick, close beside her, guessed Alda's secret and lost no time putting it to his advantage. The comptroller saw that the sooner this friendship between Wolff's daughter and the ambitious young captain was broken off, the sooner could he regain prestige.

"Ah, she is beautiful, eh? Very, very beautiful," Frederick remarked to his companion. "See how young Fortune looks at her—look, watch his eye! A pretty sight, two handsome young people—if the girl were of the Tower People who knows but there would be a match there? Well, well, I daresay she'll not look on him coldly, for all that!"

Alda made no reply, but her action spoke eloquently. She pushed her horse close to Wolff's and whispered to him. The Towerman nodded.

"Wenn," he called. The commander saluted.

"Wenn, see that this woman is locked up in the stone prison where Zorn is. Gad, she's more dangerous than the man! Go yourself and see this done—I'll take no chance of a rescue. The girl must burn at the stake, along with that heretic, or our work would be but half done."

Wenn obeyed by taking personal command of Fortune's little company. The two parties separated and as they moved away Frederick rode close beside Alda, still poisoning her thoughts in the manner of which he was a master.

WATCHING the cold, hard face of the High-born, the Red Fox regained some of the confidence he had recently lost. He saw a speedy end to Fortune's alliance with Alda.

Furious at this turn of events, yet helpless to change them, Fortune accompanied Mary to the stone prison of the Tower People. To reach it they left the Towerman's Road at a narrow street known by its ancient name, Wall.

They threaded a way among the débris, descending an abrupt little hill. At the foot of the hill was a squat, low building of gloomy, gray stone, designed with an attic roof and a noble porch supported by great stone columns, after some forgotten manner of architecture. This was the place where offenders of importance were kept—and none had been known to escape.

The old building had been in the ancient day one of the treasuries of a great government. It was overshadowed by vast, crumbling walls of ancient structures which must once have towered into the clouds, but, unlike its mightier neighbors, this solid house of rock had survived the Great Catastrophe unharmed. It was as strong and as steady as the very foundation of Manhattan.

Up a wide flight of stairs, and under the dark porch Mary was led. Wenn himself stood by while she was ushered into a cell whose door was of solid steel; whose window was heavily barred.

Fortune lingered a moment in the doorway, eager to say or do some little thing that would reassure the woman he loved. Wenn, scowling at him, guessed from his drawn face something of the agony in Fortune's heart, and because this was the son of his old friend the grizzled commander gave them a moment together.

"Mary"—Fortune paused timidly—"Mary, will you try to believe that this—this is not my doing—that I tried to save you from this place—from death!"

Mary answered him with that same impersonal glance and tone she had used in the forest. "I am not afraid of this—nor afraid to die," she said calmly.

"But you'll not die, ever! I swear that. I—I'll use my influence to stop it—Mary, have hope—"

"Do nothing. And I ask nothing!"

"Ah, but I must—because I love you, I—"

"Stop!" Mary's straightened figure quivered with her indignation. Her blue eyes flashed a bitter glance. Her hands were clenched into white fists.

"Love!" she exclaimed. "You still presume, you who betrayed the Folk! You traitor! Death by the flames I do not fear, but this—this insult—torture—have you no mercy on me?"

From that figure of wrath Fortune turned without a word. Blind to everything, he quit the prison. A messenger from Wenn at last overtook him in his swift, purposeless, mad walk, and Wenn's orders brought him back to duty.

Throughout a long day he worked mechanically, overseeing the return of hundreds of the Folk to their own cantonments.

The Under City was cold and idle. No forges blazed, no shuttles clacked, all industry had ceased. The miserable slaves of the Directorate clustered dully about their fires and faced the prospect of three days of starvation. They had ceased to

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hope about anything. They were apathetic, dumb, docile.

Their white faces and fearful glances crowded upon Fortune's misery. Everywhere he saw these cringing victims until the accumulation of their silent reproach almost maddened him.

It was past nightfall when he was free of duty. At once he went to Wolff's Tower.

Mary had forbade him to pity her or to aid her, but he was determined, nevertheless. Not to intervene for her would make him no better than her murderer. He sought Alda.

Though this was the day of her triumph the High-born was in a black mood. She could not forget the beauty of this girl of the Folk whom even the comptroller praised openly. Nor could she forget the insinuations Frederick had poured in her ear—insinuations designed to make her doubt Fortune.

If she did not love Fortune, at least Alda found a delicious flattery in his attention, his loyalty, his deference. And he was undoubtedly useful to her. But she was determined that the young man needed a lesson.

She greeted him coolly.

Fortune went after his desire without waste of time. His fair skin was flushed and his gray eyes sparkled hopefully as he began, "I come to see you about Mary, that girl who was taken in the raid—"

"Yes?" Alda's calculated sweetness at another time might have warned him off.

"Yes, I—I—she—" Fortune ran his fingers through his blond hair until it stood awry. He was at loss just how to put the matter, but desperate. "I want you to do something for her," he blurted. "To help her—"

"Yes?"

"You can see for yourself she is no ordinary woman," he hurried on tactlessly. "She is not a common girl. I—I never saw another like her—"

"Yes?" Alda purred for the third time. A trace of angry color was staining her white cheeks, and her black eyes were hard.

"IT IS not right that she should suffer," Fortune insisted, growing eloquent. "She must not suffer! With the others do as you please, but this girl—we must find a way to save her."

"*We* must find a way!" The High-born's exclamation was so unexpectedly bitter that it stopped the young man. It set him thinking.

"Surely," he began, "you will help me?"

"Why should I, my dear friend?"

"Why—well—well—because you—you are my friend, or so I have counted you. Or, if you want me to put it that way, out of gratitude. I have helped you. Yes, make it a bargain, then, do this in repayment for what I have done, and I'll be content. I will! I'll ask no more—"

"No more! You'll ask no more!" There was a savage sarcasm in Alda's exclamation, enough to warn any man.

Still Fortune missed her meaning.

"I promise it," he declared solemnly. "Do this for me, and I'll be satisfied; only this little thing—"

"*This little thing*," Alda remarked. She sat up very erect among her cushions and her imperial gesture halted his words. "Listen," she said coldly, "listen to what I say. The girl shall die. She is a rebel, and she must die, die at the stake. I'll make it my own business to see that she burns. You can understand that, eh? *I'll see her burned!*"

Fortune shrank before the bitter hatred that blazed from her eyes. He was overwhelmed with astonishment, speechless, frozen with horror.

"You ask me this, *this* in repayment of a debt!" Alda hurried on hotly. "You have helped me, I do not deny that, but in repayment you ask merely that I annul all I've gained by your aid, give it back to you because of a girl, a common woman of the Folk—a pretty-faced thing that takes your fancy—a—"

"That will be enough." Fortune had risen from the low seat he had drawn close to her divan. Towering above her, he repaid her angry glance with such a blaze of indignation that Alda drew back, secretly alarmed.

Fortune spoke slowly, in a low tone, making an obvious effort to control his passion:

"I have heard of the gratitude of the High-born," he began. "It is a proverb. I should not be surprised. You will not help her; so be it! But, mark you, if you dare say a word more about her in my hearing, if you dare hint one nasty lie, I—I'll kill you. Yes, even you!"

As if to prove the sincerity of these words his clenched fists seemed to stretch involuntarily to seize her. His white face and wild eye spelled murder.

For a moment Alda cowered, tasting a terrible fear.

Then, without a word, Fortune wheeled about and burst from her apartment.

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From Wolf's Tower he hurried into the night without objective or even coherent thought. He went on foot, in a blind, purposeless hurry. Those who crossed his path were roughly hurled aside regardless of their rank.

So this was the gratitude of the mighty! Thus was he repaid for making Alda great!

Never did it enter his head that Alda was a woman, that Alda might be jealous of his attentions to another.

He realized only that his own act had put the woman he loved in peril of her life, and that the one person whom he had confidently expected to help her had refused his plea.

He was beyond thinking. He could only feel, so he walked blindly, in an agony.

The hours passed, and still he wandered. The night was warm and fragrant with a splendid moon. He could not have said whether this was night or day.

With bowed head he was walking slowly down a wide and empty vista of ruined avenue. The clear moon stretched his shadow before him like a carpet for his feet. The old walls turned a thousand blind eyes upon him.

Body and soul, he was in harmony with this desolation.

Something brought him to a stop, listening.

He heard it again—a thin, eery wailing, muffled, but growing closer. Its high pitch told of a terror unspeakable.

The sound seemed to come somewhere from within a crumbling heap of old walls that stood in his path. Halted and immovable, he listened until his eye saw something detach itself from the shadow and come running toward him. A stooped, wild figure that clasped in its arms a heavy burden.

He recognized that this was a man and as the man approached the moonlight revealed a face that had taken an awful greenish tinge.

With a thrill, Fortune knew the man. That mask of terror that turned toward him was the face of Solf, the weaver.

TERRIFIED by Fortune's threat, but even more greatly moved by the proffered bribe, the weaver had gone over to the cause of the Tower People body and soul. He had served them with eager cunning, giving in detail every plan of the Comrades that he understood, and personally pointing out entrances to the secret tunnels of the Under City.

While he served he was well cared for, with two soldiers detailed to keep him from harm. It was only after that black dawn that saw a definite end to revolt that Solf discovered his hosts had lost interest in him. Without ceremony he was kicked from the Great Hall where Wenn had kept him. He started forth, the heavy bag that contained his bribe clasped in his arms. When he passed the guard at the arched way the weaver hugged the bag tight against his breast and glanced fearfully at the lounging soldiers. One of them started toward him with a shout and he dodged away like a rabbit.

It was his intention for the present to find some hiding-place by himself in the forest, but to do that he must pass along numerous frequented streets. Within a short distance he was stopped by several of the police guard and made to answer questions. When finally they released him he fell foul of another soldier, a half-drunken man of powerful build who laid hold of him and discovering Solf's mysterious burden, demanded to know its contents.

In vain the weaver protested. His captor flourished a knife and was for despatching him on the spot. By a ruse Solf escaped and started to run, the drunkard in pursuit. He made directly for the Great Hall and threw himself on the protection of the guard.

"Let me to the Under City," he begged.

Kicked and cuffed along a gantlet of soldiers who despised him, unrebuked by the captain in command, though none dared rob him, the weaver was thrust finally into his own cantonment.

The place was dark and idle with a terrible stillness. About a smoldering fire in the center of their large platform a number of his fellows huddled.

Solf gave thanks to his gods and kept to the shadows. Slinking from spot to spot, he finally gained his own lair under the arch and sank down breathless among his rags. The sack of coin he covered hastily and stretched himself out to sleep.

Late in the day one of his fellows stumbled on him. Solf waked with a gasp of fright as the other shook him. With a bound he whirled toward the corner where his sack was hidden and patted anxiously among the rags until he felt its bulk.

"Eh, Solf," whispered the visitor, "we've missed you. You've been gone—where?"

"Never mind," snarled Solf. "That's my affair."

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As the flame leaped toward heaven, a great cry rose. . . .

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"Oh, it is! Well, no man saw you at the great meeting, either—perhaps you know what happened there?"

"I—I have heard," muttered the traitor.

"Yet you weren't there?"

"I didn't say that, I—oh, plague, go about your business and don't bother me. I'm sick and sore."

"You look it. What have you under there? You've stolen some wine, I know. Come, Solf, share it with me, or I'll tell the others and they'll take it from you."

"No, no, no!" chattered Solf. "No, there is no wine. Nothing at all, only—no, nothing at all."

"Yes? You say so? Let me feel, ah—"

"No, damn you; no, no!"

Their hands grappled. Their bodies swayed close together as they scuffled, panting and whispering fiercely.

Solf's opponent stopped suddenly, surprised. "I heard," he whispered slowly, "I heard something—that—jingles—*like money!*"

"It is not money," Solf snapped.

"It sounded very like it. Let's see—"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"Get back, damn you! I—I'll shout for the guard."

The inquisitive one seemed impressed by this threat. He started away, but as he went he leveled a long, significant look at the quaking traitor.

"You'll wish yet that you'd been more generous with a friend," he whispered savagely.

Solf saw him rejoin the group at the fire. Among them a buzzing began. Now and then one looked toward Solf's corner.

The wretched weaver, nodding involuntarily from fatigue, forced himself to keep a sharp lookout an all sides.

He guessed what their whispering portended.

CHAPTER VII

THE UNDYING FIRE

FOR long hours Solf lay quaking among his rags.

A silent duel went on in the cantonment, the weavers about the fire, whispering and planning, watching Solf with catlike eagerness; the wretched traitor returning their stares, defying them by his sleeplessness to attempt to rob him.

Solf had had no sleep since his taking from the cantonment. In his service of treachery he had worked with a feverish zeal that had exhausted him. Inevitably, nature would conquer his will. He knew the time was close when he must surrender to fatigue.

But the watchers would not tire. There were always fresh ones among them to keep an eye on their prospective victim, and they saw that the fire was kept blazing.

Not even the most acute terror can eventually conquer exhaustion. Solf's brain grew dull. For a moment at a time his eyes would close in spite of all he could do. He would surrender himself to the delicious numbness of sleep to waken in a few seconds with a fearful starting.

And each time he wakened he saw the bright eyes of his companions watching him—waiting with inexhaustible patience for the moment when he would succumb.

Finally there came the time when his doze lasted not one minute, but several. His stiff body relaxed completely, and his consciousness strayed to some heavenly place of forgetfulness that is not of this world. He drew long, peaceful breaths, and his muscles, like his will, became as water.

From this happy state which was more alluring to him than any earthly happiness, some corner of his mind that watched like a faithful dog waked him abruptly. His quick ears caught the faint *scuff-scuff* of bodies drawing nearer. His eyes opened. The fire had burned lower, but he could see dark, blurred forms of men, crawling slowly upon him.

Instantly he had seized the hidden bag of money and was on his feet. From his throat came a shrill yell of fright that served for the moment to halt pursuit. Fearful of interference by the police guard, the men who plotted to rob Solf of whatever it was he guarded so jealously lay still in the shadows and saw him vanish from the platform.

Hugging his spoils to him, Solf ran blindly into the first tunnel opening that offered. He knew the place well. Not far from his own cantonment a great fall of rubbish blocked a little hole that gave on one of the old, blind tunnels supposedly walled off.

At this spot Solf crouched, listening. He heard the noise of men moving stealthily, drawing closer to him. The weavers, finding the guard had paid no attention to Solf's yell, had taken up the chase.

Solf scrambled painfully over the heaped-up stone and rubbish. He wriggled into the small opening, and, losing his

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footing in the blackness, stumbled and fell some little distance to the floor of the old bore.

As he fell the sack was dislodged from his grasp.

Bruised and shaken, he was on his feet without any loss of time, groping painfully among the old stones. At length his hand touched the familiar canvas. With the burden safe in his arms he started away at a stumbling, uncertain run.

When desperate men of the Folk ventured into these old tunnels of the ancient subways, they went with infinite caution, even though they knew the road. The windings of the system were bewildering to the most experienced, and branching tunnels and crossing ways made of them a labyrinth that no man of that day fully understood.

Solf had no practical knowledge of these holes. He was a weaver, his work had been comparatively easy; he had never had occasion to explore the underground mysteries of Manhattan.

And his mind, crazed by fear, kept hearing the noise of pursuit.

For as long as he could he ran, ran with a strength that comes only to the mentally unbalanced. Long after that he maintained a rapid, stumbling walk.

He had no light, nor means of making one. Often he fell, cutting his face and hands, bruising his body. Several times he floundered through deep, black water. Once he found himself in a pocket of poisonous air that barred his way as effectually as a stone wall. Often his feet escaped deeper pits in the decayed galleries only by some miracle.

AT LENGTH came the time when it seemed he could go no farther. Exhaustion halted him with swaying knees. Some semblance of reason returned, and he knew now that he had lost all sense of direction and purpose.

He became aware that he was whimpering brokenly, and tried in vain to stop the noise—to regain some self-control.

All about him was a velvet blackness without form. The air was cold and smarted his lungs and nostrils. His feet were in icy water, and a trickle of water from above wetted his body. The money he carried in his arms had become an intolerable burden.

Without the slightest warning of sound something that possessed a quick, uncanny strength of limb seized his leg from behind. He felt the prick of sharp claws and a furry body swarmed up his back, reached his shoulder, clawed at his long hair. Sharp teeth fastened in the flesh of his neck and wakened an intolerable pain.

Yelling fearfully, he spun round, his right hand groping over his shoulder until the fingers encountered a large, furry body. The claws fastened in the flesh of his hand and blood flowed.

What animal it was that had attacked him he had but the dimmest notion. The old ways harbored various wild things of the forests, and enormous gray rats and tribes of outcast cats that had bred for countless generations in these holes.

At last his superior strength dislodged the thing and he hurled it from him. Still shouting until the old tunnel rang with his noise, he ran again—and found a sifting of bright moonlight above his head.

A pile of débris where the old pavement had dropped into the tunnel gave him a means of escape. He burst from that underground place of horrors and came again into the sweet, warm air, running with hysterical joy toward a fellow man.

He would have welcomed the dread executioner himself at that moment.

Fortune drew back with instinctive repugnance from the thing that grovelled prostrate at his feet, moaning words that were only half intelligible. His impulse was to turn away from this abject terror as he would avoid some loathsome decay.

"What is it?" he asked impatiently. "What do you want with me. Get away—farther off, you hear!"

Out of Solf's whimpering he began to understand articulate fragments: "Highborn, in the name of mercy! Can't you pity—me—pity me—"

"Well, well, what d'you want?"

"Let me stay by you—a moment, but a moment, Illustrious! Only guard me a few seconds—so they can't find me—give me some corner to lie in. Help me—"

"Who can't find you?" Fortune questioned. "Will you speak!" he cried impatiently, pushing the prostrate man with his foot. "Speak. There is nobody about."

"But they are near—they are near! Unless the great one shields me I—I—they will come. Only help a miserable man to hide himself."

"Will you tell me?" Fortune exclaimed impatiently. "Who is following you— why? Speak out, Solf."

The weaver looked up with a gasp of surprise. "You know my name—"

"Certainly, I know. You are Solf the weaver, the man who—"

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"Ah-h! Now I know you—it was you gave me this money—you who ordered the soldiers to nail me to the great door unless—unless—" He stopped with a violent shudder.

"Tell your story," Fortune repeated sternly.

From Solf's disjointed recital gradually he gathered the essential facts. This abject thing in human form that clasped his ankles and grovelled irritated him.

"Be on your way," he ordered. "Be on your way. You're a traitor to your own Folk. You deserve what you are suffering. I can do nothing."

He freed himself from the weaver's tenacious grasp and moved aside.

Solf raised himself to a sitting posture. The moonlight fell on his pallid, blood-streaked face.

He lifted a shaking fist and shook it in impotent rage. "A traitor am I?" he shrilled. "A traitor! Who made me a traitor? Who threatened to torture me unless I played the traitor? Yes, let me suffer—let me pay. You—you can go your way, safe! But am I worse than you?"

Fortune shrugged indifferently at this tirade and walked on, the weaver's rasping abuse trailing behind. But one phrase had struck home and soon it halted him.

"Am I worse than you?"

If the young captain had faults they were the faults of youth and ambition. He also had virtues, and one of them was an ability to see beneath the surface of affairs. Another was innate honesty.

Was he much better than the weaver, after all? That was the problem that halted him.

Solf was a traitor. He had betrayed his comrades for a bribe, but the alternative had been torture. Who had offered him a choice of these but Fortune himself? Who had been clever enough to recognize Solf's weakness and play on it?

A morbid thought fascinated him: Was he so greatly different than this traitor of the Folk?

He, too, had betrayed the Comrades, and his bribe was the promise of power and advancement.

Wiser than Solf, he had succeeded.

Yet had he succeeded? The weaver had brought misery to his own kind; Fortune had brought misery to the woman he loved.

WITH that breadth of vision sometimes born of grief he looked back on what he had done and counted the cost of ambition. Loving Mary, intent on taking her by force, he had brought Ham to his death. Desiring power, he had bargained with Alda and betrayed not only the Folk—with the Folk as yet he had little real sympathy—but Mary as well.

If she died in the flames it would be his hand, guided by ruthlessness, that kindled the pyre at her feet.

Now he understood with a terrible clarity. He saw himself as low as the wretched fugitive of the tunnels.

Realization made him physically sick. He swayed dizzily, and spying an old rubbish heap felt his way toward it and sat, a huddled figure of misery little better off than the man he had just left.

From the understanding sprang a pity for the weaver, his fellow in suffering. Even to think of Solf made him shudder with repugnance, yet with all the force that had driven him toward his own ambitious plans. Fortune rose unsteadily and turned about.

The young captain had fallen from a tremendous height when he walked back to aid the soiled thing that had wakened his conscience.

Solf was gone from the roadway. Fortune walked among the heaps of rubbish calling his name. He ventured between walls that threatened to drop their crushing weight of crumbled masonry upon him, calling and listening.

The sound of a stealthy progress was his answer. He called again, "Solf, Solf! Come here, you fool, come here—I'm not going to hurt you! Come to me."

Something in the tone, some promise of good intention, brought the weaver back into the moonlight. Fortune addressed him brusquely.

"You had best get into the forests, into some old ruin where men cannot find you, and stay there for the present. Come with me, if you think that best. I'll see you safe to some decent hiding-place."

Fortune carried the bag of coin, Solf's blood-money. The weaver hobbled painfully at his side, shivering and gasping incoherently.

It was several hours later, so slow was their progress, that they reached the edge of one of those frequent jungles that hid so much of the old city.

In the shadow of its trees Fortune handed back to the traitor his sack of gold. Solf snatched at it eagerly, saying never a word. Still wearing Fortune's cloak, he stumbled on among the vines and disappeared.

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Fortune wandered among ruins until morning, without consciousness of time or place. Never before had he thought so long or so hard, nor seen himself and things about him so clearly.

THE day came when Wolff, the Towerman, sat in justice in the Great Hall. With him sat his daughter, Alda.

It was a proud day for the house of Wolff. The Towerman's effective handling of incipient revolution had won over the majority of the Directorate. Wolff pressed his advantage at the right moment and as a result his daughter had been confirmed as his legal successor in office.

There remained only to sentence the two heretics, Zorn and Mary, to the punishment Wolff had promised them. That was the occasion of this mockery the Tower People termed a trial by law.

Something of the form of the laws of the ancients had survived the Great Catastrophe, but it was form without life. The original honest intent of a government of the people which granted to every man the right to trial by his peers was gone. There remained only empty names and rites that made a bitter mockery of tyrannical intention.

Zorn was condemned before he appeared in that court of justice!

The recluse and Mary, under heavy guard, were taken from their cells in the old stone prison. When they descended the broad steps from the columned porch a curious little incident occurred.

In the center of this flight of stone stairs, now ruinous and littered with vines and weeds, there was a great, square rock, the pedestal of an old monument. The statue that once stood there was gone long ago, but cut deep in the base, in the ancient, printed letters, was an inscription. This told that here the first father of his country had taken an oath to serve the Folk of his day as their ruler after he had helped them to win their freedom.

Passing this memorial—a fragment of which probably all but a half-dozen of the dwellers on the site of old New York were ignorant—Zorn and Mary stopped and bowed their heads in silent homage. The soldiers about them stared curiously.

They saw nothing but a time-worn pedestal of squared stone and an inscription that no man could read. But Zorn's knowledge restored to that empty place the benign figure of the founder of a nation.

In spirit the second father of freedom and the woman whom he had inspired communed with his illustrious predecessor—Washington.

Then they passed on along old Wall Street and the Broad Way to the Great Hall where the Towerman waited to publish his revenge upon them.

Wolff and Alda occupied chairs of state at one end of a noble room in the building.

Enveloped in a gorgeous robe of golden sheen, the ruler of Manhattan still failed to fill the eye with the majestic picture

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the name of Justice inspires. Far more striking was the green-robed Alda, with her dead-white face red lips, and blazing, black eyes. Her mouth was drawn into a hard line; the look in her eyes was cruel.

If Wolff in his gorgeousness represented Justice, the figure of Vengeance that sat on his right was far more compelling.

Below the great Towerman, and a step removed from the common floor, was the platform that included a witness stand and a long table, about which were seated Stone, Director of Laws, a little man in black robe and huge, ridiculous white wig, and numerous black-robed assistants. Stone's rôle was that of inquisitor for the government.

To the right of this table was a barred enclosure, the prisoners' cage. Four huge soldiers with swords drawn stood about it keeping their pompous and quite unnecessary attention on Zorn and Mary. Throughout the long trial the prisoners remained standing.

Zorn was quite at ease, calm, unmoved, giving a careful attention to all that passed. At times an observant person might have noted that the recluse appeared slightly contemptuous of and amused by the proceedings.

Mary, in her gray robe, was close at his side, her figure held tense, youthful defiance in the glance of her bright eyes. Her impatience was more manifest; her scorn more easily read.

The hall was brilliant with the costumes of the Tower People. All of the High-born were present and in holiday array. There were numerous women in the audience, attracted by the spectacle of a woman about to be burned at the stake. For them this was a gala occasion.

THE audience was exclusively of the Tower People with one curious exception. A small corner had been railed off and guarded like the prisoners' cage. Here the Folk were represented, in compliance with an ancient law of Manhattan. There was a man from each cantonment. Technically an audience they were no better off than unwilling prisoners.

The farce that the Tower People called justice was nearing its climax. Stone, the director, was summing up his case. The witnesses had been heard.

Of these witnesses but one had been examined on behalf of the prisoner. He was an unhappy member of the Comrades who had been taken in the raid. Bewildered, interrupted, bulldozed, he had stammered an incoherent account of the brotherhood of the isle and the plans to regain freedom.

He had cut a sorry enough figure, but who can say he was not heroic! At least, he had ended by affirming his loyalty to the Torch and his belief that freedom was the rightful property of all men, regardless of degree.

Fortune had been called to that witness stand. To the evident surprise of all the High-born the young captain was a most reluctant narrator.

Excessively pale, his blue eyes ringed with dark circles that told of mental strain and sleeplessness since that night, four days ago, when he had met Solf, he answered only direct questions and in the briefest possible manner. It needed all of Stone's patience and skill to extract from him details of his visit to the Isle of the Great Woman and what he learned while there.

He stammered his answers in a voice scarcely audible.

He evaded Stone's probing; when he dared he lied boldly.

There was at least one spectator who extracted the fullest enjoyment from this drama. That was Alda. Her hard eyes glittered with a cruel excitement. Her lips parted in a cold, snarling smile. In her triumph Alda gloated.

Dismissed finally, Fortune stood wearily not far from the Towerman himself, among a little group of officers. He stared, unseeing, across the great room. His thoughts were incoherent and bitter. Most of all, he was conscious of a growing rebellion against the proceedings.

Fortune knew thoroughly how colossal a fraud was this thing they called a trial. From Wenn, standing close beside him, he had learned the intention of Wolff and the Directorate to punish Zorn and Mary by torture.

Mentally and spiritually Fortune had lived through a terrible four days, during which he had gone about his military duty with a mechanical attention to detail. He had learned to despise himself without finding any means of atonement—no hope of restoring his self-respect. Every day he had witnessed in a hundred forms the suffering his act had brought to the Folk of Manhattan.

And now the climax of suffering—he had spoken words that condemned the girl he loved to die by burning!

Only by losing her without hope of

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restoration did he learn how overwhelming was his love for her.

As far as possible he had avoided Alda and all the rest of his old world. But Alda, watching his white face, smiled secretly. She was perfectly certain why he was miserable and quite pleased to have caused his misery. Eventually she expected his return to her, very much chastened in spirit.

At last Stone's harangue ended. The Great Towerman sat silent a little time, plucking at his beard and giving all the outward signs of a man pondering a problem. Then he rose and all who were seated rose, too, as a mark of respect.

"This prisoner Zorn has acted in direct defiance of the law of Manhattan," Wolff began. "The evidence in proof of that is overwhelming. I am satisfied of his guilt."

There was a general silent nodding of heads in approval.

"The crime of inciting rebellion against Tower Rule is the most heinous in our catalogue," the Towerman proceeded. "Zorn, fitting punishment for you is beyond the ingenuity of this court. But we will endeavor to do our best—the honor of Manhattan requires it.

"For your wickedness you shall suffer. You shall suffer all that the body can be made to suffer, not that we seek a personal satisfaction, or act in a spirit of petty revenge"—here Wolff's thin, crackling voice assumed an oily glibness—"no, not in that mean spirit, but in order that all rash men who dare plot as you have plotted may see and profit by the warning.

"Zorn, I sentence you to die by burning."

WOLFF directed a malevolent glance at the prisoner. The recluse merely bowed his head gravely, and the murmurous audience noted that he showed no emotion at all. They were keenly disappointed.

"You shall burn at the stake," Wolff continued after a momentary pause in which he appeared to hope for some protest from his victim. "This shall be done thirty days from to-day, at sundown—and with you shall perish this young woman, who has also dared to raise her voice against our sacred Tower Rule. You hear, girl? You shall perish!"

Mary met the Towerman's hard look with a defiant composure. There was a heightened color in her cheek; a brighter sparkle in her eye. Never had she appeared so beautiful as in this moment of mute defiance.

Among the spectators there was a murmur of admiration. Alda noted it and hated her victim.

Disappointed again that even the girl had given no sign of fear, Wolff concluded with the formal announcement: "This is the will of Wolff, the Towerman, head of the government of Manhattan. So shall perish all enemies of our rule. Is there any man who says no?"

From the soldiers and the Tower People there was a general chorus of approval. The miserable representatives of the Folk, herded under an ever watchful guard, said nothing at all.

Released from further formality, the Tower People began to stir. Men started to talk and a woman's laugh, a little shrill, drew curious eyes.

"I say no!"

This defiance came like a thunder-clap. It produced instantly a terrible stillness. The entire roomful gaped stupidly at the young soldier who stood alone, facing the shrinking figure of the Towerman.

For long seconds after this astounding declaration Fortune remained silent and rigid. He appeared to be struck dumb by his own temerity.

Then words came to him.

"I say no!" he repeated hotly. "Your judgement is cruel—inhuman. This court is a mockery of men's sacred rights. You cannot legalize murder.

"You, who dare call yourself champion of the Folk, what do you know of them or their needs? What do you know of their suffering in the slavery you have condemned them to?

"They sought only the freedom that is their ancient right—Towermen before you have acknowledged that right—promised to restore them to their own. This Zorn has done no more than point them toward what is theirs. By what right do you condemn him?

"And this woman—an innocent woman—you dare send her to death by torture!"

Fortune leveled an accusing finger directly at the dumbfounded Towerman. "You," he cried angrily, "you who sit in judgment—you, Wolff—I ask you who gave you leave to hold freemen in subjection—to murder the innocent!"

Until this second, so astonishing had been the action of the soldier, not a person had moved. Now Wolff was seen to wave his free hand in a fluttering semblance of the usual imperial manner.

A dozen soldiers rushed forward. For-

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tune was surrounded, disarmed—a prisoner.

OF ALL that surprised and staring throng, Fortune was probably most amazed. His act of defiance, like the words which had expressed it, was without premeditation. He could never explain the impulse that had brought him to this deed.

For several months the spirit had smoldered in his breast. His character had unfolded until there were two men in one body, engaged in a fight to the death. The one was the ambitious young captain of the guard, the intriguer and schemer who sought only power and glory; the other a convert of Mary, the Torch-child.

It was the old Fortune who spoke first when the young man found himself held fast by soldiers.

"Now you've done it—you've cut your own throat," his old self lamented. And instantly the other answered in a voice which he recognized as his true self, "I'm glad of it!"

He made much the same answer to Wenn when a moment later the scarred old commander stood before him, and by Wolff's order stripped the red feather of captaincy from Fortune's helmet.

Wenn's hand trembled a little. The gruff old man refused to meet Fortune's glance, but he muttered savagely, "Have you gone quite mad, you poor, young fool?"

"No, I've gone sane, quite sane," Fortune answered, and though his face burned at this public humiliation of loss of rank, his voice was sure and his eye steady.

"Now, guard, take him away with Zorn!" Wolff shrilled. "Lock him up, and be sure he doesn't escape. You, young man, you have dared defy ordained government, you have dared blaspheme the power of the Tower People, your lawful superiors. You shall die with these mad heretics. That is my answer to you."

Wolff's rage shook him like a palsy as the captain was marched past him. Fortune's contemptuous glance passed from the yellow-faced Towerman on to the inscrutable Alda. Their eyes met. Alda's look held neither anger nor contempt, but a suggestion of deepest astonishment and a little of fear. Other than this glance she made no sign.

Fortune was thrust beside Zorn, and the guard closed in about them, separating them from Mary. They were marched quickly from the great hall.

As they passed through the streets on their way to the ancient prison, the Recluse spoke in a low tone.

"I expected this thing," he murmured.

"You—expected it!"

"Yes. You have too good stuff in you—yo are too intelligent, not to see the truth. I believed that when you first came to us on the isle. To-day you have proved yourself—you should be proud."

"Proud!" Fortune managed a crooked smile. "I've cooked my goose right enough—"

"No."

"Oh, yes! You heard Wolff? I'm done for—"

"You are only beginning. In time you'll find this the happiest moment of your life—"

"If you call burning at the stake happiness—"

"Nonsense, my friend. You'll never burn!"

Fortune stared, open-mouthed at the Recluse. A ghost of a smile showed in Zorn's eye. He moved close beside the soldier and spoke in his ear, barely audible:

"Hope for better things," Zorn whispered. "Remember what I say to you, the flame of the Torch never dies—

"But what, what—"

"The Comrades are active even to-day. I am in prison, but there are men even in the prison guard who believe in our cause. Though I am guarded I still direct what is being done to make men free."

Fortune looked incredulous.

"I do not exaggerate," the Recluse murmured proudly. "Already we have begun to gather our soldiers—the Army of the Torch. Comrades are recruiting them from the Under City, men eager enough, desperate enough, to risk their lives for freedom. You must join us. We need you, to train these men. You will?"

"What, would they take me now—after all I did!"

"They will take you gladly. Be sure of that, and—look for something to happen."

Fortune's eyes caught a glimpse of Mary's face. She had turned toward them where she was marched a distance ahead. His voice trembled on the next question.

"Mary—will she—will she be—rescued?"

Before the Recluse could answer a soldier thrust himself between them. "You prisoners," he growled, "stow that talk, you hear? Another whisper, and I—"

Fortune's hand, true to old habit, flew for his sword—and found it gone. An

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angry answer died on his lips. He had forgotten for a second that he was no longer a captain, and this man under his order.

It added to his mortification that the soldier noted the gesture and grinned impudently. His face burned.

When his eye again caught Zorn's the Recluse shook his head slightly and by facial pantomime warned him to keep silence.

VERY soon the young soldier found himself occupying a stout, well guarded room in the same prison of gray stone where Zorn was kept. So curious and abrupt had been the change in his circumstances that he kept feeling of stone and steel to convince himself it was reality.

But he had time to accustom himself to this new life. Two days went by, and nothing happened. There was no word from Zorn or the Comrades of the Torch; no visitors of any sort, nothing except the monotony of life, cramped between four narrow walls, and the sight of a soldier's face twice a day when food and water was handed to him.

He had time to accustom himself to new thoughts—a changed point of view. What he had learned from the lips of Mary, what he knew from his own observation, all came back to him. He thought a great deal and earnestly about the world he lived in.

The things he had said to Wolff on sudden impulse recurred to him as truth. Who had given this man power to keep a people in slavery? Not the Folk, certainly!

It was stolen power, and the Folk, who had lost their freedom, had a perfect right to win it back. More than that, he saw that it was the duty of every honest man to help them regain their liberty.

With growing enthusiasm he dedicated himself to the cause of the Folk, only—and this was very disconcerting—it began to seem that Zorn had spoken idly when he hinted at a rescue, or else the Comrades had forgotten him.

His heart beat faster on the third night of his imprisonment when his cell door was opened, and a visitor came in—but the visitor was Wenn, the commander, not one of the Comrades. The old soldier eyed Fortune in sorrow.

"You are to come with me," he said, shaking his head dolefully.

"Where?"

"Never mind—orders. Will you come quietly, or—"

"I'm ready, commander. I trust you."

"Wait," bade Wenn, detaining him with a heavy hand. "A moment. Is it well with you here? Do they treat you decently, eh? You are the son of my old friend; I cannot forget that."

Fortune assured him he was well treated by the guard.

"And you are still mad?" sighed Wenn.

"Still of the same mind if that's what you mean."

The commander clucked his tongue and sighed. "Too bad, too bad. Look, if you would repent now—if even you would *say* you are sorry, I think—I feel sure I could do something. Perhaps I could make Wolff reconsider—"

"What, lie my way to freedom while Zorn and—and Mary die. I—"

"Oh, as for the woman, why, I thought you—but no, that's a secret." Wenn stopped abruptly.

"What's a secret?" Fortune demanded.

"I am not allowed to say—Wolff's order. So you'll not repent?"

Fortune shook his head decisively, but he smiled on his superior. "No," he declared, "not a word will I say except I am glad I did it—and I thank my father's friend for his kindness."

"Stubborn, just as your father was," Wenn sighed. "Come then; we're off."

They left the stone prison together, unattended. They walked through the ruined streets in the dusk, alone. Fortune wondered.

"You run a risk, commander," he remarked thoughtfully. "Suppose I should escape?"

"Humph!" Wenn growled sturdily. "You think I could not stop you, eh? Let me tell you I'm still a match for a dozen of you, young man. No, you'll not escape. And besides—well, our visit is more or less of a secret from the Towerman. Can you imagine what Wolff would say if he saw me here! Your high-born friend has sent for you—and it's better to have no soldiers gossip about it.

"Alda?" Fortune exclaimed.

"Yes. God grant she can make you see sense!"

Fortune halted abruptly. "I tell you, you're wasting your time—and hers. I'll not go—"

Wenn's heavy hand tightened on his arm. "You'll go!"

"Only because you force me, then. It will do no good!"

Fortune had not spoken with Alda since that night his hand was raised to threaten

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her. Often since he had wished that hand had done more than threaten. If ever a woman had escaped what she richly deserved, he believed that was the time

BY THE familiar back stairs of Wolff's Tower he was brought to the richly furnished apartment of the High-born. Wenn left him at the door.

From her cushion Alda greeted him with a smile and a half-mournful, half-humorous shake of the head.

"You make me a vast amount of trouble," she said lightly, "yet I forgive you. Come closer—be seated."

Fortune refused the invitation. "Let me tell you, I don't care to listen to whatever you say," he remarked coldly. 'You're wasting your time with me."

"What, you're not sane yet! Perhaps you prefer to go back to your prison to wait the day when you burn at the stake?'

"I do."

Alda started and bit her lip angrily. For several minutes she stared silently at her unwilling visitor, trying to fathom him. Her rapid breathing quieted.

She summoned her self-control. Alda had found already that she had need of the young soldier. She had need of a man who could keep her informed of the activities of those of the Directorate who were unfavorable to her succession in Wolff's place. Particularly she needed a man to watch Frederick.

Frederick had been, in the past few days, exhibiting a return of his old complacency. The High-born, guessing shrewdly, was certain her enemy was intriguing against her, yet she was powerless to learn what it was he was doing.

But she judged it high time to heal the breach between herself and Fortune.

She began again in a sweet voice.

"Nevertheless, my dear friend, you must listen. You have been inexcusably rude to me—worse than that, you did the maddest possible thing in speaking blasphemy against Tower Rule. Yet because you have done me favors, I will overlook it. I am not ungrateful, despite what you once said to me. For the service you did me, I promised a reward. I am ready to give it—"

"I ask no reward," Fortune interrupted.

"Nevertheless I feel the debt."

"I absolve you of all debt."

"Will you listen? Truly I think you are out of your mind. You saved the Tower Rule. You made my ambition possible; you could have taken all the power and wealth any man could ask, the highest position in Manhattan—all that was in your grasp.

"More than that I—I was not insensible of your friendship, your devotion. I was ready glad to pay your—your love—"

"*My love!* You thought that I—I—"

Alda's voice hardened at Fortune's denial of love for her. She burst out shrilly, "Yes, mad, you're absolutely out of your mind. I see it now Because of a woman—a girl, you—"

She read the warning in Fortune's eyes and stopped with a gasp of fear. But she could not dam the flood of bitter speech that welled from her heart.

"Do not think she's escaped me!" she shrilled. "I promise you I'll find her—burn her at the stake. You hear me, she shall burn! No doubt you think you've won a point—you and your dirty-faced rabble, but remember, I hold the power here on Manhattan!"

"I do not understand you." Fortune shrugged.

"No matter, you'll understand in time. I promise you that. Now go, go back to your prison. When you burn at the stake I'll be there to laugh. Yes, laugh, you hear, laugh, laugh, laugh!"

A frenzy raised the High-born's voice to a shrill cry of rage that was not human. Suddenly she checked herself and called calmly for Trina. The serving woman hurried to her side.

"Ask Wenn to see this madman safely to his cell," said Alda bitterly. "Our interview is ended."

Then she turned her back on Fortune with magnificent composure. He went out to Wenn.

After they had left the tower, Wenn could no longer restrain his impatience. "Well?" he questioned hopefully. "Well?"

"I told you that you were wasting time."

"What, she did nothing for you—"

"You think I would let *her!* You think—oh, let it drop. I can't make you understand!"

"No," declared Wenn, shaking his head vigorously. "You can't. You're mad as moonbeams. Mad—my old friend's son—gods pity you!"

They turned off the Towerman's Road, where buildings inhabited by the Tower People gave some semblance of light to the way, and plunged into the narrow, gloomy paths of old Wall Street that went down hill toward their prison. It was more of a trail than a street that was left among the débris of ancient New York. The broken walls that rose on either side

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towered to a dizzy height and threw their deep shadows across it. Only occasionally, through some hole in the masonry, did the moon scatter luminous drops in this pit.

WENN walked in a doleful silence, head bent. Fortune, glancing about more curiously, thought he detected movement in the shadows just before them, but peered in vain. They crossed one of the rare little lighted spaces and plunged again into the gloom.

"Mad, clearly mad," Wenn was muttering. "Your brain will never—"

The words died in a dull, choking gasp. The commander was swept from Fortune's side, and he sensed rather than saw the tremendous body close to him in the shadow. Instantly he knew it for the giant, Shard.

Alarmed for his friend, Fortune sprang at the giant only to be brushed aside by a heavy shoulder that sent him staggering. He recovered his footing and rushed back. He was conscious that Wenn had been caught in that terrible embrace of Shard's, that clutch that crushed men.

"Drop him, do you hear!" he cried harshly. "If you kill him—"

"There," growled the big voice. Wenn's body dropped to the stones. "Now he'll lie quiet," Shard purred. "And you, Fortune, come with me—"

"What is it, will you hurry!" An angry whisper turned them both about. A crooked little shadow ran nimbly toward them.

Shard grumbled an explanation of their difference to Tringe.

"Oh, never mind, Wenn," Tringe sputtered. "Remember Zorn's order—it's the young captain we want. Let the commander alone."

"I am to go with you—to the Comrades?" Fortune questioned of the humpback.

"Yes, and hurry. The streets are not yet safe for us."

None of them said a word more. Fortune was led among the shadows down the slope, past the ancient prison he had so recently left in Wenn's company, and finally directly into a ruined building. His guides seemed perfectly familiar with the way.

They led him through a black old doorway and along stygian passages. They descended stairs and turned several times about corners. Finally the dank, nasty odor of the old tunnels offended his nostrils. He knew they were somewhere in the Under City, among the forgotten old passages.

After a while they came to where a torch had been left burning and beside it a pile of fresh torches to light their way. But it was several hours before they finally reached the secret arsenal of the Comrades and Fortune was led to the triangular little house underground where glowed the home fires of Kinst, the goldsmith.

Kinst met them at the door.

"Comrade Fortune," he said gravely, "you are welcome to my home—"

Kinst held out his hand as he spoke.

In the Next Issue

THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM

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There was just a moment of hesitation before Fortune accepted the grasp—old habit is not broken at once. But their fists met in a hearty embrace finally, and Fortune found himself humbly grateful to be able to claim one friend.

"Now," said Tringe briskly, "Zorn says you are really with us—"

"If you will accept me."

"Will we!" chuckled the crooked-backed man. "You may be sure of that. So that's settled. Now, if you please, there is work to do, men to drill, and no time to lose. Are you ready?"

"Ready for anything you say," Fortune assured him heartily.

"But wait." It was Shard who interrupted. "This man is not yet a Comrade—he has not sworn—"

"Nonsense," Tringe declared sharply. "We need no oath from him! Besides, we can't wait for that now! Later he can swear allegiance, when Mary is present.

"Mary!" Fortune exclaimed. "Will Mary come here—is Mary safe—free?"

Shard laughed boisterously. "Hear him," he roared, "hear him! Is Mary free!"

Tringe smiled and shook his misshapen head at the new Comrade. "Be sure she is free," he chuckled. "We took her from the old prison two days ago. Safe and back on the isle. What, you thought we'd let her perish!"

In Fortune's heart the words kindled a great fire. Mary safe—free!

Now he understood Wenn's mysterious utterance; Alda's strange threat.

CHAPTER VIII

"I SERVE THE TORCH!"

FORTUNE went to his task with the zeal that works miracles. It was well for the cause of freedom that he did. They had need of miracles, the Folk of that day!

The Comrades, complying with Zorn's order, had recruited fighting men from the Under City. Daily fresh numbers of them came stealing to the secret arsenal. They were all sorts and conditions of men, and the task of making them into soldiers was probably as difficult as a man ever undertook.

There were big, clumsy, hulking fellows from the farms of the Directorate which lay toward the North, beyond the last towers; dull, grumbling laborers from the road gangs of the builders; wiry masons and carpenters and craftsmen; fiery-tongued weavers and metal workers, and even a few pallid clerks.

Numbers of men came to them who were sick or maimed. It was disheartening, the proportion unfit to bear arms at all. Many had to be sent back to their cantonments, and every such case offered a fresh danger that their whole scheme might be betrayed by some indignant hothead.

Another thing that made trouble was the idea most of these men cherished that since this was an army to free the Folk there would be no discipline. They willingly accepted the theory that all men were equal and that, in their minds, excused the necessity of obeying orders.

Yet with all these vexatious difficulties, Fortune made progress. Underlying all this surface difference of individual ignorance he had a powerful ally—the men of the Folk were sincere. The longing for freedom had been bred in their bones. It was the one heritage of saddened generations of slaves. Finding they had a common purpose, they proved willing to learn.

The details of this army making were enough to drive an imaginative man insane. As the most skilled military man of the Comrades, Fortune at once assumed a commanding rank, though in fact he as yet had no rank at all.

He did everything, from demonstrating to those terribly earnest and frightfully ignorant awkward squads how to handle a sword, spear and bow, to directing and overlooking the work of the few busy soldiers who aided him as instructors; issuing all supplies and speeding the toil of all who secretly gave a part of their industry to equipping this forlorn hope.

Daily there came from Zorn, in his prison cell, advice, instruction, and encouragement. The Recluse was thoroughly in touch with the situation, thanks to an elaborate underground channel of communication. He was, in fact, commander-in-chief of all activity, and Fortune his busy lieutenant. But Zorn forbade the Comrades to rescue him. He had his own reasons.

Of Mary, Fortune had seen nothing. He had heard little.

Late one night, while he was snatching eagerly at a few hours of blissful sleep, Kinst wakened him with a message from Zorn. "You are to go before dawn to the isle," said the gold worker, "and present yourself to your commander. That is Zorn's order."

It is a soldier's business to obey orders and ask no questions. Fortune started

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without loss of time, though he could not help but wonder. He was conscious, too, of a sense of chagrin—bitter disappointment. For almost a month he had been undisputed commander of this army of the Folk, guided by Zorn, to be sure, but virtually master of everything. It was hard to learn that another had been set over him.

Arrived at the isle he was taken in charge by one of the beach guards and conducted toward the towering colossus in woman's form that dominated the place. Setting foot again on that ground made sacred to him because the woman he loved had stepped there, he looked about, deeply moved.

OVER all towered the huge mysterious ruin of the Great Woman's statue, and he remembered how he and Ham had sat in their small boat staring at the silhouette against the sunset. Near by was the very beach where Ham had died and Shard had pursued the rash captain into the grove. Nor was he far from that spot where Mary had said a final good-by.

And all these things seemed a thousand years old—a part of another life.

But Mary lived, and he knew she was even then somewhere near. He wondered if the new commander would give him opportunity to see her. He did not hope to speak with her, but to watch from a distance. That would be some reward for all he had suffered.

On their way they met Shard. The huge man came crashing to them out of the woods.

"Ho, Fortune," he greeted. "When does the fighting begin? I am getting sick of this waiting!"

"I don't know," Fortune answered, "but I am going now to the new commander."

"Well, surely, it must be soon," Shard puzzled. "Look you, there are but two days left before Zorn goes to the stake! We'll never let him die—why, that's madness! I tell you we must do something—or I will."

"You'll obey orders," Fortune reminded him grimly.

"Well," the giant grumbled. "I'm not so sure. Much more of this fooling, and I'll get desperate—yes, I will! Is Zorn out of his senses—have you all gone crazy together? I say I won't stand it, anyhow—"

Fortune left him sputtering. But he was really as impatient as Shard. He could not believe that Zorn would deliberately choose to die the terrible death Wolff had condemned him to. He was certain the Folk could not be held from some rash protest if Zorn did so order. But of definite plan thus far there had been no hint. He could only hope for news from the new commander.

He was ushered into that same room in the base of the ruin where he had first met Zorn. The large table was littered with books and maps and paper and writing materials. And stooped over this table, intent in her study of a map, was a woman whom he knew instantly.

At Fortune's entrance she turned toward him that dear face he had not dared hope to see again.

Mary smiled, a ghost of a brief smile of greeting. She motioned Fortune to be seated. "I am glad you have come," she said calmly.

For several moments Fortune did not trust himself to answer. He had no words adequate to the situation. What he finally said was commonplace. "I came here looking for the new commander."

Mary inclined her head gravely. There was just a suggestion of a humorous glint in her fine, gray eyes. "You are welcome," she said. "You have done splendid work, captain—you see, we have as yet no adequate titles in our army of freedom, so I must give you that you have held before. Yes, you've done splendidly—I know from the daily reports."

"Thank you." What most astonished Fortune was the utter triviality of their remarks. The meeting he would have given his life to accomplish had come about, and from what they had to say it might have been the most casual encounter of friends. He stirred uneasily. "Is the commander busy?" he asked finally.

Mary smiled again. Then she laughed briefly. "I am the commander," she explained.

"You!"

Fortune stared his unbelief.

A trace of color came to Mary's cheeks. "Yes, by Zorn's order, issued yesterday. Would you like to see my authority?"

"No—of course what you say is true, but—a woman— Can you understand my surprise? I—"

The young soldier lost himself completely in a bog of phrases.

"Let me explain," Mary began gently. "Zorn thought it best, since he cannot take an active part in the work, that someone who knows his plans thoroughly should direct. I am the only person. For years we have planned what could be done,

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planned it out together—how impossible it used to seem while we planned it!

"Now that the thing is happening it seems just part of a familiar game to me. I think that was why he chose me—of course, in fact, you will lead. I can only direct, using the judgment Zorn has given me with such wonderful patience."

"It is splendid!" Fortune interrupted her with his sudden exclamation. Probably since the Great Catastrophe it was the first sincere tribute from a woman concerning her ability in matters where men usually ruled. But Fortune was gifted with a quick imagination. He had come to a belief in a much more difficult theory—the equal rights of men. To believe in Mary was a simple matter.

MARY bent her head in acknowledgement of the compliment, and bending it, hid the sudden, glad light in her eyes.

"We have such a pitiful little time," she began briskly. "We'll get to the business at once. Only two days before the day of the burning—"

"Good enough," Fortune cried. "How I've wondered about that—and gotten no satisfaction! Surely—surely we're not going to let Zorn die!"

"That I do not know," Mary answered, in a deeply troubled voice. "I wish—oh, how I wish I knew the answer!"

"You—don't—know!"

"Zorn has not said. He will not answer. Even to me he will give no answer, and never before was I left out of his confidence. I am troubled—I'm afraid—"

"But he must not die—we can't stand by and let him die!"

"Captain, be sure of this—if Zorn can best serve the cause by dying at that stake, so he will die. You and I can do nothing—"

"Well, surely—"

Mary interrupted him. "Zorn believes his martyrdom the most fortunate thing for the cause. He says it centers attention on what we hope to do—it inspires the Folk. If he plans or expects a rescue, he has said nothing of it to me—or to anybody, so I believe. Tringe has been often in touch with him recently and, perhaps—but no, I'm sure even Tringe does not know. But I can tell you this—" Mary's eyes glowed. "The setting of the flame at Zorn's feet is the signal for the uprising of the Folk. Then we will strike!"

"Praise heaven for that—"

"You will be ready, captain?"

"As ready as can be—yes."

"Then look at these plans. We have much to work out together. From our friends of the Tower army we know their general plan for the burning. All the Folk are to be assembled, under heavy guard. That is Wolff's order. He believes Zorn's death the final object lesson that will crush us—the fool!

"And when the Folk assemble—here is the manner in which they will place them—our men must be ready, too. See here."

Mary spread out her maps. They bent over them together.

The problem was no simple one. It included the secret assembling of all their trained men, a total now of almost six thousand, and to do this, avoiding discovery, at a time when the whole city would be on the move, required their best thought.

Golden evening light found them still at the work. They settled the final details as day ended. A meal was brought to them, and they ate, still discussing details.

Mary rose. "It's done," she declared.

Fortune, rising also, bowed formally and added a military salute. He turned briskly toward the door.

"Need you go so quickly?"

Mary's gentle protest halted him in midstep. He was only half credulous he had heard right.

"You—you said—pardon, I did not hear—"

"Need you go so soon—it may be good-by for a long, long time."

How difficult this was for the young soldier who had come only a couple of months ago to take Mary by high-handed force!

He looked up timidly. "May—I stay—a little time by you?"

"Shall we climb up to the parapet?" Mary suggested. "Since we last met a number of things have happened—I think we have something to explain before we part."

He followed her in silence up the iron stairs down which Shard had once carried him, a helpless prisoner. In silence they stepped out into the warm, fragrant air, standing under the misty stars.

Mary leaned against the parapet and, not so close as he would have been in an earlier month, Fortune leaned too. He saw her dimly silhouetted against the smudge of blue night. A steady little breeze that brought with it a brisk sea odor blew past her and whipped out a strand of perfumed hair.

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STILL they were silent. Fortune began to tremble. How much he loved this wonderful girl—this girl of the Torch. He loved her with all the strength and purpose of his life, but now without hope. No matter how kind she could be he knew his own unworthiness.

Mary had become something more than human in his eyes—a woman who took something of the divinity of the cause she served. Yet when she spoke he was astonished.

"I have thought a great deal since our last meeting. I spoke hastily then, and I am sorry. I believe now you meant me no harm—and for what you saved me from I am your debtor."

"Thank you for—believing," he muttered. He added with curious honesty, "I don't quite know what I intended—I intended so many things at the same time! I think, perhaps—you are right. I would not have harmed you, yet—I'm glad I lost you."

"What, you are?"

"It—it makes me think—" Fortune was not very clever at explaining himself. "It made me think—about a great many things. Really, it was that brought me—well, to the cause. You see—"

"I heard, I heard it all! What you did at the trial, what you told Wolff—that was splendid. It was like you—"

"Like me! I tell you I thought—sometimes I still think I was—well, insane."

"No," Mary decided quickly, "just the contrary. Sane, quite sane—living according to the best that's in you. I knew you could do it—I honor you for it."

"Then you honor me too much."

Mary shook her head quickly but kept silent. This mood of hers puzzled—then thrilled him. She invited his confidence—she invited more than confidence!

Mary's manner invited him to—hope.

And as he realized this he saw that he must strengthen his own resolution. He was unworthy—utterly unworthy. Never by word or deed must he indicate again the feeling that ruled him.

Firm in this conviction he determined to put all chance of weakness—all temptation—out of reach. "Now I must go," he said abruptly.

"What—" Mary's voice showed her hurt. "And not even tell me again that you are glad to serve—with me!"

"No!" A little of his agony was betrayed by the tremble of his voice. "I am not fit to say—that. I serve only the Torch."

He saw that Mary had drawn back at this speech. He realized how crude it was. He sought in a panic-stricken way to find some words that would soften it. He could think of nothing at all—could only stand stiffly, miserable and helpless.

Then there came a startling interruption, so mysterious and appalling in its suddenness that all other thoughts vanished with its coming.

The sky above their heads was split with a great flash of bluish fire. It was quick as lightning, and to them seemed as brilliant, yet unlike lightning this flaming mass dropped swiftly from on high, and as it fell, long streamers of it dripped from the heart of the flames.

The ancient wall was lighted brightly by it, and their faces and hands stood out in ghastly radiance.

It came with no accompaniment of sound and in a few seconds it passed, dropping from the zenith into the sea.

With its abrupt extinction they found their eyes blind. Instinctively they groped their way close together.

Then, from high above them, somewhere in the vast metal folds of the colossal figure, they heard a shrill, unearthly chuckle of delight.

THE eery laughter that came to them from high overhead reassured Mary. She stepped away from the soldier, who had thrown a protecting arm about her, and she echoed the laugh with a little exclamation of amused impatience.

"Tringe," she called, "come down here. Are you trying to scare us to death!"

"What!" Fortune exclaimed incredulously. "Did he do that?"

"I suspect him," Mary whispered. "But how he did it I do not know—"

A pounding of heavy feet on the iron stair interrupted her. Shard burst upon them, breathless.

"You saw?" he shouted. "You saw it—that horrible omen! Name of mercy, what can it be? The heavens have opened to drop fire on us—! You—you s-saw it?"

"Y-you s-s-s-aw it!" mocked a high, thin voice, and followed the mockery with another burst of inhuman laughter. Tringe came bounding down the stairs. "Y-y-you s-s-s-aw it?" he giggled in shrill falsetto. "Hey, old beast, d'you think the skies are pouring fire to slay you for your sins? Now perhaps you'll repent your rude ways?"

"You—you little insect," Shard bellowed angrily. "You did that to frighten us! Let me catch you, and by all that's sacred I'll flatten you like a fly."

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"Be careful, I tell you!" The crooked-backed man was still giggling so that he could scarcely articulate. "Be careful, or I'll b-burn you up. Hey, take your hand off me!"

"Let him be, Shard," exclaimed Mary. "Tringe, what was that you did?"

Tringe advanced from the doorway. Fortune he recognized with a comical little salute. He had not ceased to shake with laughter.

"Oh, that!" he gasped. "Nothing at all—only an experiment—"

"What is it you carry, yes, there, under your arm?" Mary questioned him severely. "You know you nearly frightened me to death?"

"Then I'm sorry," said Tringe humbly, "but that just goes to show what a success it was. Oh, this? Why, only a kite, dear Mary—only a kite."

"You mean you won't tell us what it was you did?" Mary insisted.

"Not yet, not yet," panted Tringe. "It's not complete. I must test it further, but it's a fine idea—"

"Fine idea," Shard snorted. "A fine idea indeed! Pray what is it good for?"

"Some day you'll know, old elephant," Tringe replied mysteriously. "But now I have some other things—things already perfected, that I want to show to Captain Fortune. Will you all come to the workshop? They're ideas of mine, and I think you can use them, captain, when you fight the Tower People."

"Has Zorn approved?" Mary asked.

"Yes, to-day. Told me, in fact, to be sure the captain saw everything. Come along, come along, all of you. You'll see some queer things, I promise you—things you'll be glad to know about."

Mary whispered to Fortune, "By all means let's go. He has been working in secret, under Zorn's direction. It is a part of the plan. I'll confess I'm dying of curiosity to see."

"Comrade," Shard's tone was humble now, "may I come too—may I see what you've done?"

"Yes, come along," said the inventor, "but promise me you'll not go mad with fright and wreck my workshop!"

For answer Shard picked up the hump-back with a sweep, and carried him, shrilly protesting, to the stairs. Following Tringe and Shard out of the monument and into the grove, Fortune and Mary dropped behind.

"Who is this man?" questioned the captain.

"Nobody—everybody," Mary replied. "Zorn declares he has inherited the wonderful mechanical genius of the ancients. He says he will be the greatest man of his age, and I think he is partly right.

"I cannot tell you who he is because we do not know. Years ago, when Zorn brought me to the isle, a little girl, Shard already lived here. He had escaped from bondage, and one day while he prowled in the ruins of the old city Shard found a baby—a pathetic little bundle. From his birth Tringe was maimed as he is to-day. Fortune, his parents had thrown him out to perish!"

"The devil! Well, I've seen it done. Go on—"

"Shard carried the little thing here to the isle. He had been father and mother to Tringe.

"Tringe was grown—if you call that body grown—when we came. He was the playmate I knew, he and the giant. For years now he has studied in Zorn's books, reading about all the wonders of the ancients. And he has built—oh, all sorts of odd things, and mixed queer messes. I suppose folk would call him mad, but Zorn says he is a genius."

FOLLOWING their guides along a narrow, wild path, they had reached a low, shedlike house in the heart of the grove. A light shone hospitably from its windows, and Tringe, skipping ahead, threw open the door and stood silhouetted against the glow, a distorted little figure of a host.

The shed consisted of one longish room Several lamps of unusual brilliance lit it At the door Fortune stood peering at the most curious jumble of things he had ever seen.

A long workbench with vise and a tool-rack behind it was easily recognizable. So was a smith's forge and bellows. The walls were lined with shelves, and the shelves were crowded with all manner of odds and ends—glass jars; bowls; models in miniature of odd little machines; rolls of paper; a few tattered books; the dried heads of numerous wild animals; brushes and pots of color; little figures that were modelled out of clay.

Near a window stood a low table with a slanting, desklike top, such as artists now use, and on it spread a number of plans for still more machines.

On a little pedestal at one end of the room he noted a replica of the Great Woman of the isle, a figure of clay with the missing arm that bore the Torch com-

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pletely restored. The modelling was excellent.

At the opposite corner was a stand such as sculptors use for their work, and on this stood some vast object covered with a cloth. It's very shapelessness provoked the imagination.

"Come in, come in," Tringe invited.

Shard was already in the room, looking about him with widened eyes, his jaw hanging open.

"Now here, we'll begin with this," Tringe led them to a metal tripod in one corner. "Wait," he said with growing excitement. "I'll show you something, I'll show you."

From his forge the crooked man brought a coal of fire and set it in the tripod. Scrambling onto a chair, he reached among the cluttered jars on a shelf and brought down one.

He poured some of the contents of this jar into his hands. "Observe it well," he invited. "You see?"

"It is earth," said Shard.

Fortune and Mary nodded.

"Yes, earth," Tringe agreed, "but such earth as you never saw before. It is one of the earth mixtures known to the ancient ones. Now watch; did you ever see the like of this earth?"

As he spoke Tringe emptied a small handful of the mixture over the glowing coal. Instantly the room was lighted by a brilliant flare of that same bluish light that had fallen from the sky. A thick gas rose and threatened to choke them.

The illumination continued for perhaps four or five minutes, dying out slowly. Some of the strange fire that bubbled in the tripod seemed to boil over from its container and drops of it spattered the earth floor. There these drops continued to burn, twining and hissing like serpents.

"Suppose some of that fell on a man, hey? Just suppose," Tringe rattled on. "Suppose one could throw a handful of it on Wolff! He'd talk no more of burning Folk at the stake!"

"Wonderful!" Fortune exclaimed. "Let us have some. Our soldiers can throw it when they are at close quarters."

"Oh no, not that!" The inventor laughed. "See, here is something better, something that will throw this fire almost as far as a bowman can shoot. Come, what d'you think of this, eh?"

Clutching at them, Tringe drew them to the corner, and held a lamp so that they could see a curious piece of machinery. The crippled inventor, holding aloft the lamp in one hand so that his twisted face was brightly lighted, made an odd enough picture to arrest attention, but the machine he exhibited was still more unusual.

On a low carriage of wood that moved on small wheels, a tube of cast-iron had been mounted. At the rear end of this contrivance was something that looked like a crossbar, except that instead of a bolt, this bow appeared to shoot a plunger into the tube. To wind the bow spring there was an arrangement of a crank and cogs; and a trigger worked by a string to loose its force.

Near the rear, on the upper side of the pipe, a round hole perhaps four inches in diameter had been cut.

Fortune after surveying the machine with eager curiosity, shook his head. "I can't make it out. What is it for?"

"Aha, look here." Tringe now brought out a small, round package covered with stiff paper. From the package protruded an innocent appearing string.

"In this," he exclaimed, "is a great lump of my fire-earth—it is something like what the ancient ones termed gunpowder. When I wish to use my machine I light this bit of string, which has been soaked in wax, and drop the little parcel into this pipe, so."

THE inventor went through the pantomime of lighting the fuse and depositing the missile in his weird cannon. Then he wound the crank that stretched the bow spring taut.

"I cannot show you here," he explained, "but if it were day and we were out of doors you would see. When I start the machine by this cord, *whang!* goes the bow. The missile flies out, high into the air, wherever I point it. And if I time it right it bursts into flame as it falls—flame enough to burn up a dozen men."

"It will work, you are sure?" Fortune questioned.

"Will it work, ha! Look out, captain, I've trained a couple of men to use it so well they can hit a target the size of a man from as far off as the best archer can shoot. And it kills not one, but a dozen when it spreads its awful fire."

"By the Torch, we must have that thing!"

"So you will, so you will. Under my direction some of the smiths have cast a dozen of these in the Under City. They are now complete, waiting you at the arsenal, and I have trained some men to use them."

"Splendid!" Fortune exclaimed. "Splendid. That will help to even our numbers

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when we meet the Tower army. Why, it's wonderful. I can scarcely wait to see them when they receive those balls of fire in their ranks!"

"Yes, but wait. There's something else as well. Here, what would you say this is? Look."

Tringe carried the light to the opposite side of the room, and various exclamations came from his guests. The lamp revealed a large, rounded object made of metal plates. In the center it rose above a man's height, curving away from this dome at either side. It was perhaps eight feet long and about four in width where it touched the earth. From underneath peeped the rims of wheels.

"Well, well," grinned the crooked-backed man, "what do you call it?"

Mary shook her head, at loss for a name.

"It might be a giant's shield, lying on the ground," Fortune suggested.

"Looks to me like a tortoise—a huge, old tortoise bigger than ever any man saw," growled Shard.

"That's it, that's it!" Tringe slapped the big man affectionately on the leg. "Just what I call it—my tortoise. Look, captain."

The inventor slipped back a panel in the iron machine and revealed a low door. "Step inside," he invited Fortune. "No mischief in there; see for yourself."

With the light he showed that the inside of the contrivance was hollow. There was nothing within except the frame of its four wheels and some handholds depending from its curving roof.

"Well, if you wish." Fortune stooping, crawled cautiously inside. "Seize that hand-hold," Tringe directed from the door. "Push against it—there!"

At Fortune's push the clumsy contrivance got into motion. It rolled slowly along, like some lumbering turtle of mammoth proportion as the soldier walked beneath and propelling it.

"Look, do you see anything else?" Tringe prompted.

"I see slits, all about the sides, slits such as a bowman might use to fire from," Fortune answered through the door. "That's all."

"Yes, that's all. Slits for bowmen, that's exactly it. Look you, captain, the machine will take three men. See, its shell is hard iron, a tough old tortoise. One man can push it along as he pleases, looking from the slits to see his way. Two others can walk under it, and when they are ready they can fire their bolts of arrows through the windows.

"Swords cannot dent it. Even rocks, if they were thrown from the top of Wolff's Tower, would roll off without harming the men beneath. Did you ever see such a tortoise as this!"

"But just what good can you do with this?"

"Look, suppose we are in battle. I have a dozen of these tortoises in the arsenal, all ready. They come rolling out of our ranks, shooting their arrows. The Tower Folk shoot back, but their weapons are useless against the shell. Their swords get blunted hacking against it. They can do nothing, and meantime our archers can pick them off.

"Or suppose they have been chased into one of their big towers. We can send one of these machines right up against their wall and there it can stay while the men within it kindle a fire to smoke them out. You see, you see?"

"Why, it might be done," Fortune answered slowly, "it might be made to do. We must try it if chance offers. Tringe, you are wonderful!"

"Ho," chuckled Tringe, "I know a thing or so, eh, old Shard?" The inventor shot an affectionate look up toward his big friend. Shard growled an inarticulate compliment.

"There are other things as well," Tringe went on presently. "Some day you shall see. I promise you surprises before long!"

"You'll never surprise me more than you have to-night," Mary assured him with a tender smile. "Zorn was right—you are a genius—"

"Or a magician," Shard amended somewhat quickly.

"Both," Tringe smiled. "You shall see!"

The night was more than half gone before they had finished examining and admiring the strange engines Tringe had made. There in that rude shed on the isle it was their privilege to know the brilliant genius whose name has come down to our time and probably never will be forgotten.

Tringe, in after years to win immortal fame as the re-discoverer of electrical energy and the first man to harness steam as the ancients used it, was to them only a friend and an equal. Yet in spite of the old belief that the prophet is never honored by his own kind, they left marvelling and full of praise.

They saw—particularly Fortune that the crooked-backed man owned something more precious than beauty, the mind of a master inventor.

And Fortune, who secretly despaired of

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his little army, had gained a new confidence. He saw in Tringe's machine something that would make up the lack of thousands of men.

Mary and Shard walked with him to the beach, where his boat waited. He hesitated about his good-by.

"I shall not see you—at least until that first battle is over." Mary spoke with a return of her old kindness. "I—I wish you every good thing—my friend."

Again hope flamed in Fortune's heart, a flame as unnerving as the strange thing they had seen from the parapet. Impulse moved him close to this woman he loved. He longed to touch her hand—but he forbade himself that little consolation.

But he could not quench the glow of hope. He was about to go into a battle. Perhaps there he would find means to redeem himself, to win back the respect he owed himself. If he could do that—

"Good-by," he said abruptly.

He pushed his little boat afloat and sprang in.

From the dusky beach came Mary's final word, "Good-by. I will pray for you."

CHAPTER IX

THE STAGE IS SET

ALDA'S distrust of Frederick the Comptroller was proved in a sudden and startling manner. It happened the day following Fortune's visit to the Isle of the Great Woman.

Wenn, the aged commander, came to Wolff's Tower and stammered a tale which at first the Towerman and his daughter could scarcely credit. There had been revolt in the army.

During the last few weeks some person of influence and wealth had been corrupting the Tower soldiers. The commander, who himself had discovered this but a day before, was of the opinion that not one division might be counted upon to remain loyal to Wolff.

"When the hour comes that the Highest-born must die," Wenn explained, "these soldiers will rise and demand Frederick in the Towerman's place."

"Frederick!"

Father and daughter exchanged a long, anxious glance.

Wolff stormed and threatened. Upon Wenn he poured scathing abuse while the old soldier sat with bowed head.

But abuse from Wolff could not alter the fact. From Ransome, that same captain of the guard who once had guided Fortune into the Under City and still remained loyal to the commander, Wolff and Alda heard corroborative evidence.

On the eve of the burning of Zorn, the occasion Wolff had planned for assembling all of the Folk of the Under City and demonstrating his might, the ground had been mined beneath their feet. They dared do nothing, make no move unless Frederick could be won over.

It was Alda herself who made the decision. Dismissing Wenn, she sent in haste for the comptroller.

The three were closeted a long, hot afternoon. When the comptroller rode proudly from Wolff's Tower he carried Wolff's promise of an alliance, and Alda's word that she would marry him.

With her cold lips Alda had pledged that troth, and had her kiss poisoned Frederick she would have been glad.

In the very moment she grasped it, Alda saw her triumph elude her. She would come to rule, yes, but in name only.

Frederick she hated, and hated particularly because she feared his ability and strength.

She had lost everything—power which she loved best of all, and the young soldier who had taken her fancy.

For in her selfish way, she too, had loved Fortune. Now he was gone. In her black rage Alda cursed the name of Mary, the Torch-child—for upon Mary she blamed the entire disaster.

* * *

In that hot August noon the masons had been marched back to their cantonment, each working gang with its own guard. When they reached their place in the Under City, glad to get out of the blazing sun, they found everything in excitement.

The police were carrying the order that every family must be ready to march within an hour. This was the day set for the execution of Zorn, who dared preach that the Folk had rights.

The mason's cantonment was a distance of several miles from the place of execution. These Folk would have to start early, for naturally their progress would be as slow as the slowest among them.

There was an unusual buzz of talk everywhere. All kinds of wild reports were floating about. The novelty of an extraordinary holiday produced a general liveliness. There were plenty who welcomed the diversion with a smile. Zorn's death

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did not mean much to these thoughtless ones.

Old Murph was not one of those who rejoiced, but the cautious, wrinkled laborer assembled his own family group with a certain excitement, and having done this duty mingled with his fellows and passed on from group to group news that added to the general thrill of interest.

"I look for surprises to-night," Murph whispered hoarsely. "Yes, big things will be doing! Ha, if you knew all that old Murph knows you'd be wise!"

Murph dusted his roughened hands with gusto and invariably waited after this introduction for the questions of his neighbors.

Duly paid in advance by flattering attention, Murph would proceed: "Now look, here's the way of it—this is how I know. Only this morning I saw again that man who brought to me the news of the great meeting, and gave me that little toy torch I've always kept.

"Yes, this very morning. I saw him again among the old walls. 'Oho!' says I, 'this is no healthy place for you, my friend. Best make the dust fly before the guard sees you.'"

"He beckoned me close. 'Brother,' says he, 'to-night you and all the Folk will be taken to see the burning of Zorn by the Tower People. Go with your guards quietly. Whatever happens at the place of execution, do nothing rash against Wolff's men. They are armed and you are not. Protect your women and children by obeying them.'

"'Well,' says I, 'you've changed your tune, Mister Torch. Now you're blowing on the other side of your face!'

"He only smiled at that and shook his head; his entire course of action seemed mighty mysterious.

"'Let me tell you this,' he went on, very severe, 'the Folk have good cause to hope. Better things are coming. What I have advised you is only for your own good—so that innocent and unarmed people may not get hurt. No, I can't say what will happen, but hope, my friend—hope and pray for the Comrades of the Torch!'"

"Well, Murph, what do you make of it?" his neighbors would ask.

Murph could only shake his head. "Something will happen, that I'm sure of," was his reply. "I have heard, even, that a new army has been raised, an army from among the Folk. Perhaps we shall see to-night!"

At this the skeptical, and they were a large majority, would shake their heads.

"An army of the Folk!" one scoffed. "Yes, there is—when the Torch burns I'll believe that!"

But there were always plenty of limber tongues to pass on the talk. And what Murph was whispering so eagerly was whispered by others of the Folk of various cantonments who had received similar startling warnings from Comrades. The entire Under City of Manhattan hummed with rumors.

At about two hours after noon the population of masons was formed into columns along the underground platforms, while fresh bodies of soldiers moved to places ahead and behind and beside them. The task was done only with the greatest confusion. Trembling women were cuffed and hustled here and there; children cried frantically, and now and then a man who had dared to protest was dragged from the ranks for a lashing or a blow across the face.

Then, after weary standing, when there was some appearance of order, their march began. Slowly they crowded up the stairs, through guarded doors into the brilliant, hot sunshine. There were women and children among them who, for a time, went completely blind in daylight. All were affected to some extent, and as the afternoon progressed the air became closer and more humid so that various ones dropped exhausted and lay like the dead.

THEIR plodding march began, and a great dust cloud drifted with them, poisoning the already overheated air. It was necessary to halt them frequently while those who had fainted were dragged out and either revived or left behind.

As the hours wore along, one looking from any of the occupied towers could have seen the old ways of ancient New York, marked out by similar dust clouds. The Under City had begun its march to the place of execution.

Silent caravans of despair, the Folk toiled toward the rendezvous appointed for Wolff's triumph. The ancient dust hung about them and settled thick in the folds of their rough, blue smocks. Faces and hands were masked in it. The strongest dropped with the heat. Only the soldiers, afoot and riding, carried themselves with the familiar, trained precision and spirit..

Whimpering children and draggled women; sick men and well—all who could move and breathe were there. Never before

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had Manhattan seen such a thing. Never since has there been a spectacle like it. This was, indeed the ebb tide of freedom and human right. Civilization on this continent had reached its darkest hour.

Toward evening there came some relief from the heat in one of those dramatic and terrifying thunderstorms out of the west. A terrific rain deluged the pilgrims and rose steaming from hot brick and mortar about them. But after the storm the air cleared so that human lungs could stand it. It seemed as if even an intolerant August had been stirred to pity for these helpless ones.

The place of execution was on the southernmost tip of the island, facing the sea. It was a spot associated with the earliest recollection of the Tower Rule that began after the Great Catastrophe of 1989.

Before the destruction of the old city of New York, this space had been a public park. The ancients called it the Battery. It sloped very gently toward the water, and the ruinous sea wall, and from it one could gaze down that vista of salt water that had once been a great harbor.

There, some little distance off-shore on the island, loomed the colossal figure of the Great Woman, mutilated by disaster and the work of time; as yet unrecognized by the mass of men.

In this park the wilderness had encroached and the forest crept close to the sea except for that small, cleared space known as the place of execution. The first of the refugees from the Great Catastrophe had ventured from their shelter in the old subways to this ground. Close to the sea, the clean, fresh air had first been felt here so that, of the Manhattan of tower days, this was the oldest place; just as in the earliest civilization it had been first settled of all the island.

On this August day of 2078 the place was a neglected little clearing surrounded on all sides of the south by the thick groves of oak and elm and walnut that masked so much of the neglected ruins. The clearing was roughly semicircular, open toward the water. At about the center of this semicircle a stout stake had been fixed securely and before it a small raised platform.

Lying ready was plenty of firewood, and dangling from the stake itself were the chains that waited to welcome a victim.

Standing at this stake, looking seaward, one finds the assembling Folk on his left. On the right was a low platform, surrounded by a guard of honor, where waited chairs of state for Wolff and the Directorate. Behind this place of honor rose several tiers of seats to accommodate the Tower People.

The sun was setting before the last of the Folk had reached the ground where they were to stand, facing the pyre. To right and left of them large companies of soldiers stood guard, and in their rear were more soldiers, mounted men and infantry.

The seats allotted to the Great Towerman and his suite were still empty, but numbers of the Tower People with their retinues of servants already had arrived. Men were anticipating darkness by lighting collections of torches and a number of large lamps set on tripods.

From the Tower People's seats there came noisy talk and laughter. Their servants hurried about on various errands. Fresh arrivals were continuous. Small as their numbers were—the entire tower population was probably not above 1,500 souls—they managed to give the scene an air of holiday excitement.

To the left the Folk stood silent or merely whispering. Many of them were too exhausted by the hard march to have interest to spare for the scene. Others were stricken dumb with fright. Here and there, bolder ones had sat on the grass or lay at length resting until the slowly patrolling soldiers would spy them and bring them to their feet with threats and prodding of spear butts.

The stage only waited its principal actors. These were already on their way.

THE DOOR of Zorn's cell was thrown back by Captain Ransome of the guard. The captain found the Recluse awaiting him. He glanced curiously at the prisoner. How would this man face death?

Zorn's pallor was no greater than usual. He stood erect and easy, and he smiled slightly, welcoming the guard without any trace of fear.

But the stern face, lined with evidence of a nervous decision and illimitable will power, was not softened by the mechanical smile. Zorn's eyes of blue seemed to blaze upon the men who came to take him. He took his place in the rank without a word, and moved off among Ransome's soldiers, his head held high, the blue eyes looking far into the distance.

Only once, when they descended the imposing steps before the curious, ancient prison, did Zorn unbend that look. Again it was when he passed the pedestal that

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had once held the figure of Washington. Here he bowed his head as before, and caused the same momentary halt among his escort while he silently communed with the first Father of Freedom. Then he walked on, unafraid.

A moment or so in advance of Zorn, the Towerman reached the place of execution. A flourish of trumpets along the Towerman's road, which ran to the left of the place and just in the rear of the herded Folk, announced his coming.

A mounted escort jingled across the open. Behind this, surrounded by guards, came a procession of litters, the first marked by crimson drapery and pennons of Wolff. The second chair contained Alda, and beside it moved another with the bearings of Frederick the Comptroller.

Frederick descended nimbly from his conveyance. He was at hand to give an arm to Wolff and then to bow ceremoniously over Wolff's proud daughter as she alighted.

The Tower People from their balcony took cognizance of this distinguished company by rising. By now the various directors were also afoot, and the little procession, gay in its costuming, moved into the appointed seats.

There were some who noticed that Wolff leaned heavily on the comptroller's arm. He seemed to breathe with difficulty, and his fluttering hand went often to his heart.

Others, and they were the women, noted Alda's sudden affection for Frederick, and gossip was born of the moment.

None of them could have guessed that Wolff's illness and his daughter's conduct had their origin in that same interview of the day before when the Red Fox showed his cards. The blow had aged the Towerman; in the heart of his daughter it bred a cold, calculating hatred masked by hypocritical smiles.

Now over all that field there was a mutual intake of breath. Darkness was complete, but the flare of torches showed the scene in ruddy brightness. All saw that Zorn was being led to the place set for his death.

A soldier on either side of him, the Recluse mounted three steps to the pyre with a dignity that thrilled every spectator.

The men bent beside him. Chains were snapped about his legs. His hands were shackled together, a short length of chain between them. The soldiers stepped back, and all could see the black-robed prisoner, standing erect, head held proudly, his eyes peering far away toward the dusk where lay the sea and the statue of the Great Woman.

The stage was set at last. They waited.

WOLFF was standing in his place of honor. His reedlike voice fluttered to that silent throng of Folk. "People of Manhattan, the law of the Tower People shall be done. This man Zorn has defied our Tower Rule—and you see where he stands now! So shall die all who dare believe as he believes."

The Towerman then addressed himself to Zorn: "Prisoner, you have heard the sentence. What have you to say before you die?"

Zorn spoke now, and every soul in that field heard his voice, clear and strong and musical. The words he said have echoed and still echo wherever free men live, though the voice has been stilled for centuries:

"To you, Towerman, and those who rule with you, I say nothing," Zorn began. "To you, Folk of Manhattan: I bid you listen to a message I am praying with my life to deliver. Hear me, lest I die in vain!

"Here, on this soil you tread, in the ancient day, freemen lived. They were such men as our time has never known. They came to a new world seeking liberty; they bought it with their blood and anguish, and those who came after them lived to enjoy its blessings.

"They were the proudest Folk in the world; and humblest in their pretense. They were the strongest of all; and kindest in their might.

"Sons of the lowest rose to places of greatest honor. No man acknowledged any master save the common will and the law of right and reason. There were neither towers nor towermen; guards nor slaves. Every man, at his birth, owned the right to live, to follow his own will and to seek his own happiness.

"That all time might know them these Folk of old built out there on the little isle, the figure we call the Great Woman —Our Lady of the Torch—their Goddess of Liberty. She bore aloft the torch of freedom, lighting the world with its rays.

"Time and chance have robbed her of that torch. Men cannot see it to-day. It is gone—yet, I tell you it exists!"

Zorn's voice rose now to a note more thrilling, more powerful. It riveted the attention, silenced the protesting lips of Wolff, stayed the hand he had raised in alarm.

"Men say the Torch is gone," he cried.

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"Men say its flame is burned out. Either they lie or they are blind.

"The Torch is there; it burns with a fire unquenchable.

"Though the human eye cannot see, the eye of faith discerns it. In our hearts we feel its flame. Our souls thrill to its light. And in time to come you Folk of Manhattan will cast down the masters who enslave you; break the chains that hold you, and living in that blessed freedom that is your right, restore that Torch so that never again will men forget liberty which is the common property of all."

A moment Zorn paused, and the hush of that straining multitude was terrible. It was as if these thousands feared to breathe while he was silent.

Suddenly he flung up his shackled hands, and the arms stretched out toward the south, out toward the blackness that masked the Great Woman.

"Believe!" he shouted. "Have faith. The Torch is there and will always be. It burns! Its flame shall never die."

The guards about him heard the shrill cry of Wolff. They saw the signal of the Towerman's hand. The trumpets flared, and a man with a flaming brand darted forward to light the pyre at Zorn's feet.

Eyes that saw this man, watching in terrible fascination, saw him halt as if an arrow had pierced him, not ten feet from the stake. They caught the glint of light on his mad, goggling eyes; saw the jaw fall slack; noted the rigidity that held his limbs entranced.

"The Torch! The Torch! Look, it burns!"

Zorn's chained hands guided their gaze. As one man would look they followed the gesture, out into the gloom of the night.

A universal cry, fear, astonishment, terror; a cry of excitement, prayer, hope rose from every lip.

Far out there in the dark mystery that brooded over a sleeping sea, a light had flared and risen higher, higher. In a flash it spread above, below, such a light as never men had seen; bluish, ghostly in its early radiance, brightening and growing until eyes could see, against night's curtain, a colossal figure—the statue of the Great Woman had tipped forward benignly, one clasped arm bearing the tablet of the laws, the body posed in flowing lines of beauty as the figure strode, and held high the missing arm men had forgotten.

And that arm held a Torch, held it high that all might see. And that Torch burned!

A flame that leaped toward heaven, dimming the evening stars, streamed from its wide bowl and spread its broad, silvery path along the silken water, straight toward the Folk of Manhattan.

So men's dreams came true.

THE Torch burned steadily, its flames streaming from the huge bowl straight toward the zenith. Gradually the illumination from below that had picked out the detail of the figure of the Great Woman dimmed again to ghostlier hues and slowly vanished, but the beacon glowed on high.

Until the figure itself faded into night not a sound had come from the multitude. All eyes were riveted on the beautiful spectacle; all tongues were tied.

But with its going came a shrill, terrified cry. Eyes not blinded by the mysterious illumination saw that the Towerman, who had risen to stare at the miracle, was swaying weakly.

Wolff's hand clutched at his heart. His face was ghastly. His scream ended in a gurgle, and he dropped, his body hanging limp across the rail that separated his place of honor from the ground below.

Instinctively the massed thousands guessed the truth A great cry spread among them: "Wolff is dead. Dead! The Towerman is dead!"

Frederick, close beside the fallen man, sprang to his side and thrust a practised hand against his heart. Even those close to him could not hear his voice for the clamor, but they recognized his act.

Frederick swept Alda to the front of the Towerman's box. Snatching the helmet from his head he seized her right hand and held it high in a pantomime that proclaimed her ruler of Manhattan.

In the climax of the wildest scene the island had witnessed Alda reached the goal of ambition.

And scarcely had she grasped the prize before there came the first indication of danger—the first hint of the end of Tower Rule.

A soldier spurred a lathered horse across the open and flung himself panting before Frederick.

"The Great Hall!" he stammered. "They are attacking it—the Folk have risen! Wenn bids you come—at once!"

From this breathless messenger Frederick gathered bare details. A division of men had been left to guard the towers during the burning Even the crafty comptroller had laughed at the notion, but Alda had insisted and so had Wolff. They had been moved to this more by a desire to

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humiliate the aged commander than any thought of real danger.

Now, said the messenger, a force of armed men had broken from the woods west of the Towerman's Road and were pressing the defenders of the ancient seat of government. Only the chance of Wolff's petty spite which left Wenn and his soldiers there had saved the place from falling into the hands of these rebels.

Shaken as he was by the astonishing course of events, Frederick acted with quick intelligence.

The huddled, bewildered Folk were still held rapt by the miracle of the blazing torch when the bulk of the Tower army, with the Tower People riding in their midst, swept northward from the place of execution toward the old citadel.

The small police guard left behind began briskly to herd together their charges and drive them to the Under City. The confusion on that field was terrible.

In the midst of this struggle and shouting a half hundred determined men, Comrades of the Torch, ran from the cover of the oak groves and released Zorn from his shackles. Their work passed almost unnoticed in that tumultuous confusion. The prisoner had been forgotten.

Even before the Tower People came to the relief of their stronghold, Zorn was taken to the Army of the Torch.

The Recluse found the men led by Fortune beaten back into cover of the groves about the Great Hall. Wenn's brilliant defense had defeated them in their first battle.

The surprise had failed. Fortune's disappointment and chagrin communicated itself throughout the force of three thousand amateur soldiers he led.

Now it was for them to take by patient siege what surprise had failed to do. In the gray dawning of a new day, Zorn and Fortune surveyed the old building, and their task seemed impossible.

From its central tower the Towerman's flag waved in triumph. Its mighty, cliff-like walls loomed strong and massive as some huge mountain. They knew, too, that it housed the flower of Wolff's army, at least seven thousand men.

From the roof far above it would be easy for defenders to hurl great rocks and shower spears. The myriad windows offered ample loopholes for bowmen.

VIEWED from the wood, the Great Hall looked solid enough and strong enough to dishearten any soldier. Fortune shook his head gloomily. Even the Recluse was thoughtful, but not discouraged.

"We will send at once for Mary," he announced.

"Why?" asked the captain.

"Because—" Zorn glanced about to be sure they were not overheard. "Because of the men," he said cautiously. "They are new at this work of fighting. They have little to keep up their courage, and a siege is slow work, sometimes. If these men stay idle, without something to think about, they will lose heart. Two days of idleness, and we'd have no army—"

"The cowards would dare desert us!"

"Don t call them names, Fortune. They're good men—true hearts—but they lack the soldier's experience—his philosophy. Therefore, Mary. And we'll bring up Tringe as well. He's ready now with his new guns and those iron shells you saw—perhaps even more engines of fighting. I count on Tringe."

In those first morning hours the siege of the Great Hall was planned in detail. The Army of the Torch, totalling a few hundred more than three thousand men, was placed in the most advisable manner.

About the Great Hall was open ground, kept so purposely for military emergency. On the west that open part extended a considerable distance, from the huge building as far toward the North River as the Towerman's Road, the ancient Broad Way. The old street itself was screened but slightly from the hall by light growth. North and south around the building the open was almost as wide, though on the east, where the land dropped away rapidly into vast swamps, the jungle had crept closer.

The nature of that eastern ground, with its intricacy of forest and swamp growth, its steep slope and boggy soil, made it impossible to do more than post a thin guard that could watch the rear of the building. North and south, moving under cover of the woods, was a patrol of more considerable numbers, but almost two-thirds of the besiegers were massed on the west, the one point where battle would logically develop. These soldiers were disposed through the woods west of the Towerman's Road.

Down the old Broad Way this morning came the most curious procession of that time. If the Tower People from their high parapets glimpsed it, it must have proved a sore puzzle to them.

A little company of men dragged along twelve of the quaint cannon Fortune had

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seen in Tringe's workshop, rolling them all the way from the secret arsenal. Behind the cannon came a dozen of the iron tortoises, apparently moving of their own volition as the men within trundled them along.

A guard of fifty bowmen accompanied this equipment, and riding at the head of that guard, in shining armor, the dear, brave figure of Mary, the Torch-child —a sight to hearten the most desperate man.

Mary reported herself to Zorn with a soldierly briskness that brought an approving smile to the director's tired face. "I wait your orders," she declared. Her cheeks were flushed with health and spirits, and her bright eyes found a glance for Fortune, who paid this military apparition the compliment of open-mouth admiration.

"Mary—child," exclaimed the Recluse, "you are the most wonderful engine of all this array—even Tringe cannot think up a marvel like you. You stir men's hearts, and that's better even than Tringe's cannon."

Tringe skipped over to fondle his cannon.

"Shall we use them today?" he questioned, as eager as a child. "Can we try them?"

Zorn shook his head gravely. "I doubt it. I doubt it very gravely. There may be fighting, but I don't look for much until Frederick has time to guess our numbers and our disposition. And we'll not use the guns until they come out in force against us. You must wait."

The inventor's face fell. "Speed that time," he murmured. "I doubt if I have heart to wait for it!"

TRINGE'S impatience was the common state of mind of that army. They were nerved for fighting, but not for waiting—and waiting proved the order of the siege.

The day developed skirmishes that were easily driven back. Zorn used as few men as possible in the open, depending mostly upon his bowmen. The secret of Tringe's engines was guarded jealously.

The second day was almost totally idle. The third as bad.

August was hot, and time passed slowly and with unusual discomforts for these men used to housing. Supplies of food, drawn from the stores made ready in the arsenal, were sufficient, but difficult to apportion and cook for such large numbers. The strain of constant watchfulness made these new soldiers irritable, and lack of occupation, except for the monotony of drill, made them desperate.

By night the Great Hall flared with watch fires. By day its guards kept many eyes on the woods about it, and remained under cover. Occasionally a few arrows whistled back and forth across the paved open. Except for that, the old stones baked in the heat, and the Army of the Torch fought mosquitoes and querulous voices.

"Zorn promised us freedom," they growled. "Is this that freedom he spoke of so glowingly? We're worse off than before. Better the Under City, with a soft bed and regular food, than this lying in the dirt waiting to be killed!"

There were desertions during these days of waiting, in spite of the vigilance Zorn inspired in his officers. And even worse than desertions were the rumors of disaster. These amateur soldiers were quick to lose heart.

In mid-morning of the fourth day of siege—it was the thirteenth day of August of 2078—pickets hurried to Zorn.

"A big flag," they reported eagerly, "a strange big flag has gone up from the highest tower."

They were puzzling about this flag when two soldiers led a man to them. It was old Murph, the mason.

"This man declares he has important news," a soldier explained. "Come then, you Murph, talk up to the commander."

"Ho, yes, the news," exclaimed the dusty messenger. "Look you, your mightiness, here's something under way that means mischief to you. This morning in my cantonment—I am of the masons—I was wakened by armed men. Soldiers were marched among us, through our places, and up the stairs.

"They came pouring out of the tunnel upon us, many, many men. I made courage to ask one, and he told me—they had been led during the night through the old tunnels that the Tower People forbade us to use. They came from the Great Hall—"

"Ha that looks bad!" Fortune glanced from Zorn to Mary. "Frederick plans to surprise us, in some way," he added.

"How many soldiers?" Zorn questioned.

"Mightiness, how can I say. I—I cannot count numbers—I do not know, but many. Oh, yes, enough so that when the first of them were going up the stair the last were entering our long platforms. They filled the place."

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"The mason's cantonment?"

"Yes."

"I HAVE seen that place," Fortune said. "Enough to fill its platforms would make, perhaps, a division—a thousand men."

"Well, and where did these soldiers go?" Zorn pursued.

"Aha!" Murph grinned wisely. "I know! I went with them. Our guards have been lazy since the night of the blessed miracle. I slipped out after these men. I followed. They are now in those deep woods behind you."

A sentry interrupted them. He had run far through the wood and he gasped his news with difficulty.

"The attack!" he stammered. "Behind us—a great force of the—Tower People back—there—they're coming!"

Then from the east along their lines rose shouting. "Coming out—they're coming out. Arm yourselves!"

"From both sides!" Fortune exclaimed.

"Tringe!" Zorn shouted. "Tringe!"

"Here, sir." The inventor skipped to him.

"Are your engines ready, and served by men?"

"All ready. God be praised, they may speak at last!"

The Recluse turned to the priestess of the Torch. "You will stay behind our front line," he instructed. "Be careful always, but go among the men and cheer them. They believe in you. And Shard, go at her side, protect her."

Fortune hurried with Zorn to the edge of the wood. About them the bowmen lay flat in the sparse cover, their weapons trained. Behind this rank, dispersed across their front, were Tringe's engines of war, the twelve little cannon. The men held torches ready to fire their charges; their fingers itched for the word to loose those triggers.

And farther back, in concealment, was the curious company of twelve grotesque iron tortoises, swaying impatiently as the men inside sensed the mounting fever of battle.

Under the north and south wing of the Great Hall was a large colonnade. From among its arches now poured large bodies of the Tower Army, a formidable array. And out of the arched way that pierced the center of the building advanced another quick-moving column. The three wings joined their ranks, and swept forward across the open, at a fast run.

They came charging, those soldiers of the towers. Their banners flaunted bravely. Sunlight glittered on their equipment. Five minutes, and there was not a sound save the thunder of their running—then, close to the forest, they raised an exultant yell.

Tringe, plucking at Zorn's sleeve, was dancing with impatience. "Now?" he begged. "Is it now? Give me the word—give the word to fire. Surely now—will you never speak!"

Zorn surveyed the terrifying advance unmoved, thoughtful, apparently heedless of the grotesque little crook-back who pulled at him.

Finally, with a startling abruptness, he wheeled on Tringe.

"Now!" he said. "Loose your machines!"

And at his nod, Fortune leaped into the open, his back to the advancing host. He called the order that brought out a shower of arrows.

Front and rear, the battle had begun.

CHAPTER X

A NEW WORLD IS BORN

THE ATTACK of the Tower Army from the rear proved to be what Zorn had guessed. Two divisions, approximately two thousand men, had been sent by the round-about to divert attention.

Over-captain Ransome, who commanded them, had orders to take no chances. His business was to feint an attack, but wait until the trumpets told him Frederick had cut through from the east; then rush in to cut up the retreating Torches.

So Ransome kept his men under cover of ruined walls, and the fighting that followed during several hours was tame. But the eastern front made up in heaping measure for what this rear action missed.

Along the Towerman's Road the great force, fully four divisions, led by Frederick, answered the first shower of arrows by increasing their speed. Shoulder to shoulder, the ranks plunged on, and though here and there a man went down, the force of that charge seemed irresistible.

From the wood came a strange battle sound, a longdrawn *wha-a-ang* of one of the new cannon. Its snarl heralded the appearance of an odd and terrible missile that rocketed through the air and dropped into the close-packed ranks.

And as it fell the missile became a large ball of fire.

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The fire spread as water spreads when it is splashed from the pail. It must have touched fully a score of men as the ball broke, and screams of terror announced its arrival.

The snarl of released springs spread along the puny battery of new engines. The air was filled with fire.

On the edge of the woods, the close-packed ranks staggered. In a twinkling their order had become a fearful confusion.

Everywhere men rolled on the ground in agony. Flames licked about them. Overhead and under foot the awful, slow-burning fire spread, destroying whatever it touched.

And into that milling, seething confusion of men, the brave dozen of cannon continued to pour their punishment.

"Swords and spears! Swords and spears!" Fortune shouted the command, and it spread among the companies. "Charge!" The trumpeters took up the order.

The Torches broke from cover, and the cannon shifted their fire above the front rank to those of the rear, which were still trying to push forward.

For a quarter of an hour the fighting held even. A half an hour found the packed mass still unmoved.

The very weight and extent of Frederick's attack held it immovable. Betrayed by its ponderous numbers, the Tower army was stalled, under direct fire of the vicious flame-throwing engines.

Here and there the line of battle swayed and bent and fell back into the woods. Elsewhere Alda's soldiers gave back.

Then, as an ice-jam breaks when its riddle is unlocked, the whole force unraveled. Through their own dead and dying the Tower soldiers fell back.

And the cannon, lifting their smoking snouts, followed the retreat with their spray of flame.

Those who were giving ground suddenly saw a new terror emerge from the woods. The dozen steel shells, lumbering slowly at first, faster as they reached the paved way, came rollicking forth.

From their armored sides sped arrows.

Then it was that the retreat became a rout. These mysterious engines of death that moved among them unscathed by sword or spear, and cleared their way by slaughter, were too much for Frederick's men.

Within an hour after they emerged from among the great columns, the Tower soldiers were gone, save for those who lay dead on the pavement. And they were many.

From new positions to north and south Tringe's cannon kept up a slow fire that made that open too terrible for men to risk. The iron tortoises, all save two that were lost, had returned to cover. The sun beat down upon an empty space. The attack was broken.

Still, the Great Hall defied them.

Its roof, high above them, swarmed with men. Their arrows rained on all who showed themselves, and for any who came closer they had a plenty of heavy stones that showered down and pitted the ancient pavement with holes, so fearful was the impetus of their long fall.

The Tower People could not drive their foe from the woods, but that foe could not approach the Great Hall.

ZORN sent for Tringe.

"Your air attack—is it prepared?" he asked.

"I'm only waiting the word," said the inventor. "I've a hundred men in those old walls there to the north. We can put a hundred machines up. Gods be praised, there is a favorable wind."

"An *air* attack!" Fortune gazed, open-mouthed. "What—what madness are you speaking?" he stammered.

Zorn smiled and waved his hand toward Tringe, who was scamping away to the north.

"Tringe again," he exclaimed. "At every turn his quick wit saves the day. You shall see—"

"But what is it?"

"Watch for it. That is the only way to understand. I have said nothing of this plan by Tringe's request. It is uncertain—dependent upon the weather; and he feared to be thought a boaster. But I have hopes—"

"Where will it come?"

"Up there." Zorn pointed to the sky. "Watch," he advised.

Uncertain what to think, Fortune stared at the sky. If it had developed some terrible storm-cloud to pour wrath upon the defenders of the Great Hall, he would not have been astonished. His faith in Tringe was supreme.

But the sky remained brilliant, hot and unclouded. For a quarter of an hour, at least, there was no sign at all. The battle seemed to sleep.

Then there rose into the blue a new sight, not in the least terrifying. As a

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boy Fortune had done the same thing himself. Somewhere to the north somebody was flying a kite.

Rapidly following came more kites—and more.

A great flock of these paper birds was winging down the breeze, climbing higher and higher, dipping, whirling, shaking their long tails.

They were kites bigger than Fortune had ever seen. It seemed, too, as if they bore curious-shaped bundles on their flapping tails.

He turned a puzzled face to Zorn.

"Wait," the Recluse commanded. "Watch them."

Other men were watching now, every man near that place. The soldiers of the Torch forgot all else in looking skyward, and along the parapet of the cliff-like Great Hall tiny figures of the defenders could be seen clustered while they stared.

The flock of kites, flying close together like an army, drifted slowly down breeze as if a common intelligence guided them. Several pairs of them became entangled and fell, but the mass moved on, unshaken.

Now they were higher than the dizzy roof of the Great Hall, and almost above it.

"Ah, look! That one fired too soon." Zorn pointed, and Fortune saw, falling toward earth, a smoking, flaming mass. This struck the paved ground in the open and burst into a splash of fire that ran, boiling, in every direction.

Now he understood. A shout of exultation broke from his lips. He understood what Tringe had done.

And in a moment longer all understood, for the kites, hovering above the roof of the Great Hall, where the defenders clustered thick, began to loose their freight of death. The sky rained fire.

Beneath that deluge panic held sway in the Great Hall.

Those who watched heard the terrified shout that greeted the first air bomb. They could see the pigmy figures, silhouetted high against the blue, scamper to one side and another.

From a thousand throats simultaneously came a gasp. Mounted on the dizzy parapet a man, with arms flying and smoke licking about him, tottered a moment and fell forward. He fell, a bundle of flames, spinning in his sickening drop until he crashed to earth. Then another, crazed by panic, leaped after him.

Fortune turned away, sick with terror. Only Zorn looked on unmoved.

"They'll trouble us no more," he pronounced gravely. "Gods be praised for that. Now to smoke them out!"

Tringe came flying back through the woods.

"It works!" he was shouting. "It works! You see—you see what it does?"

Zorn turned on him briskly. "Get your hand-packages ready for use at once. Fortune, bring me five companies of men, unarmed. Quickly!"

The Tower People had been driven from the roof of the Great Hall. They dared not venture from below into the flame-swept open. Except for a desultory fire of arrows from the windows, they were doing nothing.

This was the moment Zorn had anticipated—the moment he had planned. Again it was the brain of Tringe that helped him.

THE ATTACK by the Torches was led by Fortune and the unarmed men—unarmed, that is, to all outward appearance. But four men out of five carried sacks flung from their shoulders, and the sacks were filled with balls of the new fire-earth. Each fifth man bore a torch.

This company charged across the wide open space almost unscathed. At the row of great columns which stood alone in the fore court of the Great Hall they began to climb.

The north and south wing of the Great Hall curved forward, leaving a court across the middle. The outward side of this court was masked by the columns, tremendously thick, and tall pillars of solid rock. The top of this colonnade was a continuous capital of stone, wide as a small street, and leading to windows of the Great Hall several stories above the earth.

Some of these old columns were covered by the thick growth of creepers. They made an easy ladder for the men who swarmed up.

The first up sent down ropes to their comrades. Soon the ledge of rock topping the pillars became crowded with men. Too late the Tower People understood.

From the windows at either side soldiers began to tumble, climbing along the ledges, advancing to meet the attackers in mid air. They never reached them.

To the north and to the south the Torches spread along the ledge, and as they advanced they began hurling their terrible bombs.

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Fire spattered the old walls. Men fell or jumped to the earth below. The windows nearest the invaders cleared of opposition. Five minutes after the first of them had started, men were pouring into the Great Hall by these windows and driving back Frederick's soldiers into the corridors beyond.

As the men armed with fire had charged, a second charge followed. A division and a half of soldiers of the Torch, armed with sword and spear, crossed the open, and dividing about the building, commenced to force its various doors.

Zorn, with half a division of men, waited at the edge of the woods.

The Recluse stood outwardly calm, though it is doubtful if he was as unmoved as he seemed.

Finally the Great Hall swallowed all traces of battle. What was going forward within its halls he could only guess.

Mary had crept close to Zorn, sharing his waiting. Her face was turned to the bright sky as she prayed for the soldier she loved.

They saw a man dash from under the colonnade and sprint toward them. By his helmet they knew him—Fortune! He shouted as he ran, but they could not distinguish words.

He leaped to Zorn's outstretched hands, stammering happily, breathlessly:

"The Great Hall—is taken. We—have won!"

A sharp command started the small reserve force to the aid of the rear guard. In one mad charge Ransome's men were driven back, and victory was complete.

Several hours later Zorn and Mary made their way across the open toward the Great Hall. Weary with the fighting, but unscotched, Fortune accompanied them, eager to tell of the battle.

Even as they entered the open and glanced at the central tower of the splendid old building they saw Wolff's banner fluttering down. They halted with rapt faces to note this final token of an end to Tower Rule.

As they came under the colonnade at the south side, a company of their own soldiers, herding a long column of prisoners, noted them and raised a cheer that started the echoes.

The doors at street level gave on a corridor of marble which ran the length of the building. Its ceiling was far above them, and of noble design. At either end a marble stair curved downward to the pavement.

Pavement and stairs were littered with bodies that told the cost of that last defense. Trapped between the invasion from above and from the doors, the Tower soldiers had been slaughtered like cattle in the shambles.

The captain, who hurried to conduct them, reported that far overhead, through the myriad corridors and rooms of the ancient pile, desultory fighting was still going forward. Small groups of the Torches were collecting the prisoners and gradually clearing the building. He told them that Wenn, the commander, was among those prisoners.

"Frederick," Zorn questioned, "what of him?"

The captain shook his head. "He had not been found—nor Alda. Strange, yet not so strange. The building is so vast. We'll smoke them out, be sure."

From floor to floor they made a slow progress. The corridors still stank of Tringe's explosive fires. The litter of battle was everywhere.

Now and then one of their own wounded crept forward to touch Mary's hand, and for each one Mary had a personal message to be treasured more than any decoration for bravery.

THE CLIMB upward was a laborious undertaking, but they pressed on, eager to see everything.

Now and then, down the ancient and unused corridors of these high levels, echoes of fighting came to their ears. Mostly they were alone, the three, moving as in a dream, the joy of victory so new it could not be realized.

They reached the roof and the sunlight.

Zorn looked proudly across the city from east to west, along the island from north to south. It was a peaceful scene. The August sun baked the ragged old walls and time-worn towers; the forests waved in green oases. He saw the two great rivers flowing to join the shining sea, and along the east shore of Manhattan the fantastic, twisted tracery of once mighty bridges. Far off, beyond Wolff's shining tower, beyond the narrow toe of the ancient Battery, he saw the silhouette of the statue, the Great Woman, who bore aloft the smoking torch.

Zorn saw all this familiar ruin of ancient New York, and he saw, with the inspired vision that lighted those piercing blue eyes, the picture of a new civilization taking its place. His eye of faith foresaw

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the golden towers of a new city—a new land—the land of freedom.

He spoke as one would pray: "And now a new world is born!"

Beside him Mary lingered, rapt with his vision, and near them, abashed, ashamed, a humble intruder on their great moment—Fortune.

How long Mary stood she did not know, but suddenly she turned with a happy cry to the young soldier.

The cry died on her lips, staring beyond the captain.

A great, disheveled figure had burst to the roof from one of the numerous stairways. In his hand he bore a naked sword. His red beard flamed; in his eye was the light of murderous insanity.

Frederick had eluded his pursuers by a few precious moments and gained the open. Intent at first on escape, he had swiftly changed that purpose at sight of the three who stood alone—the three who had brought all his greatness crashing to the dust.

Even as Mary stared he sprang toward Fortune, his sword sweeping for a death blow.

It was Mary's cry and the eloquent warning in her look that saved the soldier.

Quick as a cat, he, too, looked, and leaped to one side. His own sword flashed and glanced beneath Frederick's open guard. The blade drew blood.

Then steel clashed against steel, while Mary and the Recluse stared at them fascinated.

For all Fortune's skill the insane anger of the Red Fox bore down his blade. The younger man shifted cautiously, giving ground. Frederick rushed him, shouting.

That rush drove Fortune against the stone parapet of the roof. His back to the waist-high wall, he parried desperately.

There came to them the sound of shouting. From a near-by door a dozen breathless soldiers of the Torch. They raced for the fugitive.

There was a momentary flicker of indecision in Frederick's blade. He leaped backward, dodging Fortune's point, and in a second he had sprung upon the parapet.

His sword the comptroller hurled from him, far into the void. With arms raised high, he spun about and leaped outward, following his blade.

The soldiers brought them word of Alda's death. She had taken her own life when they surrounded her.

SO THE shouting and battle vanished, and peace came to Manhattan.

A little time after the fall of the Great Hall, Folk in the cantonments of the Under City discovered that their police-guards had disappeared. Here and there, from the doors that were closed so many generations, venturesome ones crept out and stood in the sunlight, listening, trembling at their venturesomeness, marveling.

Carefully, cautiously, these pioneers moved farther from the old Sub-Ways. They found none to block their path.

Word went back. The news spread with the rapidity of light through the old tunnels. Bands of the Folk gathered in the streets, still a little awed and timid, smelling the honest air and stretching mightily.

And a little at a time these explorers began to move on, meeting none save soldiers of the Torch, who shouted a welcome to them. They clustered about the Great Hall, and the tale of the fighting passed on from mouth to mouth. They even ventured into the dreaded building itself, and none rebuked them.

First moments of incredulity melted into the ecstasy of realization. They were free!

They could come and go as they pleased; there were no longer any soldiers to drive them.

Even as they clustered, wondering, buzzing with talk, columns of prisoners under guard were marched past them. And among these prisoners they saw the High-born—the Tower People who had held the whip so long.

They were still too stupefied to think of revenge. There was, as yet, little bitterness. In silence, and marveling, they saw these masters taken away to prisons Zorn had chosen. The Recluse anticipated much. For their own safety he kept the High-born under heavy guard during these hours of chaos. This time, as he well knew, held more potential danger than any moment of the revolution.

For the same reason Zorn had the towers seized and soldiers set to hold them.

And the Folk wandered from place to place. Some began to sing; some to caper boisterously. The soldiers of the Torch looked on and laughed. The excitement grew and spread. The taste of freedom carried an intoxication like wine.

Toward the close of that busy afternoon Fortune was summoned to the an-

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cient prison where Zorn had been kept. A soldier brought him word that Wenn, the old Commander, must see him.

The aged soldier sat idly on a little cot that furnished his cell. His scarred face was sunk between his hands when Fortune entered. Wenn was weary with a great bitterness. His world had crumbled to dust, and he suffered the humiliation of a surrender.

A kindly impulse moved Fortune to place his hand affectionately on the older man's shoulder. Wenn gave him a haggard glance. "Well," he growled slowly, "your madness has triumphed. Conqueror, I salute you!"

"You fought your best," Fortune tried to console him. "No man can prevail against the new engines—"

"Nor against a world lost to reason!"

"I still call it sanity." Fortune smiled.

"No matter, no matter. Because of your father—and the love between us—I am glad you live; glad you are happy, if there is happiness in this crazy universe. Give me your hand."

Their palms met. A long look passed between them.

"Good-by," sighed Wenn. "May the gods be kind to you. You are a good soldier. May you triumph over success as you did over defeat. Good-by."

Fortune made no comment on Wenn's farewell. He understood it. In the evening, when a soldier brought him word that the old commander had ended his life, he was not surprised.

He was not surprised, but he was grieved, nevertheless. Victory had left him no more to expect from fate. Returning consciousness of his sore heart made him sad.

In battle Mary had been out of his mind, or at least out of immediate consciousness. Now he remembered the old longing, and his own unworthiness.

Mary had been kind when last they talked on the isle, but he felt now, as he felt then, that he had no right to hope. He had been a traitor once; not yet had he wiped out that stain.

Preoccupied and sober, he went through the streets toward Wolff's Tower. Here Zorn had taken his quarters, and begun the administration of the city during this emergency.

The old Broad Way was crowded with the Folk. Some had built huge fires, and danced and shouted about them. Other wild groups were parading the street and

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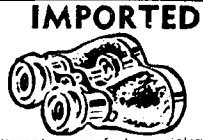

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singing rude verses they had improvised to suit the day.

The mobs swirled about him, making way with flattering good nature wherever his face or uniform was seen. All about him was a hysterical joy, and in his own breast the ache of loneliness.

He became aware that somebody was clinging to his arm and shouting at him. He looked into the face of Kinst, the gold worker.

The little goldsmith's pale skin was glistening. His eyes sparkled with wild excitement. His long hair flew in the wind. He kept shouting, "Hey, hey, hey! Have you heard; have you heard the news? Did you hear about it?"

FORTUNE paused, and submitted to Kinst's wild embrace. "You have heard —heard the great news?" Kinst repeated.

"What, the freedom? Why, yes, I know."

"The freedom? Oh, that!" Kinst shrugged impatiently at such a puny thing as freedom for the Folk. "No, my news—about me—my son is born!"

"Your son—is—born!" Fortune had difficulty restraining a laugh. Kinst could see Tower Rule fall unmoved, absorbed in the birth of a baby.

"Yes, yes," the goldsmith babbled. "Born to-day—born to-day, you understand? *Born into the new world!*"

Then Fortune comprehended a little of Kinst's happiness. He saw, faintly, what it meant to this man of the Folk that his child should have an opportunity as good as any man's. And because he had played a part in bringing this to pass, he felt a glow of pride.

Outside Wolff's Tower a vast throng had gathered. There was a continuous shout going on: "Zorn! Zorn! Zorn! Zorn!"

Despairing of fighting his way through that press, Fortune made his entry by that rear way where so recently he had been taken to Alda. He reached Zorn just as the Recluse gave word to open the doors of the big hall below, and let in all who could find room. With Mary, Shard, and Tringe, he stood by Zorn in the little balcony overlooking the hall during the wild enthusiasm that proclaimed the Recluse ruler of Manhattan by unanimous choice of the Folk he had freed. Stirred to forgetfulness of his private sorrow, he thrilled to the epic significance of that scene.

The touch of warm fingers on his own turned Fortune's head. "The air is close,"

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Mary whispered. "Will you take me away?"

He guided her out of the little knot about Zorn. They walked together in silence. In silence they turned into a dusky and empty room. They moved together toward a window, and stood looking down on that strange old city of ruins, throbbing tonight with a new pulse of life.

Their eyes traveled farther, toward the harbor and the sea, and there they saw the flaming beacon—the kindled torch of the Great Woman of the Isle.

"It has burned ever since that first night," Mary explained in answer to Fortune's exclamation. "Tringe knows the secret of it. He declares it will always burn so long as he lives."

"And after," Fortune declared fervently. "Men will never let that flame die again—they will never forget."

"They will never forget," Mary echoed.

Fortune interrupted the pause with a chuckle. " *'Till the Torch burns bright,'* " he quoted. "I was thinking of a verse of old doggerel, a song the children sang—and once I put my faith in it! It told how I would come to rule until the Torch burned. And I—I used to believe it—at least in a way. I tried to make it come true."

They were silent. Mary moved closer. Her hand found Fortune's.

"It changes men's lives, that flame," she mused. "It makes them into something—finer. It has changed you; I have seen what it has done."

"Yes, it has changed me," Fortune admitted. "Changed me, that's sure enough."

"For the better," said Mary. "Yes, it has. Don't think that I am blind; I have seen. You have become something very—splendid! I am proud—of the man it has made of you—"

A great trembling shook him. "Mary," he questioned hoarsely, "Mary, has that flame changed you, too? Has it moved your heart to pity—to—Mary, can it teach you to love me?"

Mary, the Torch-child, believed by many of her time to be something more than natural—perhaps even divinely descended from the Great Woman of the Isle—Mary, who had led men to a glorious victory, surrendered now with a gladness that proved her all woman.

"It has taught me to love you," she whispered proudly, "to love you as long as the Torch shall burn. And that—that means—forever."

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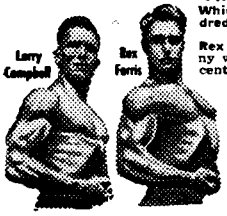

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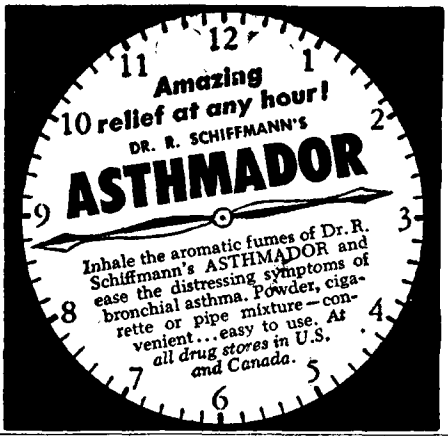
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FANTASTIC NOVELS

(Continued from page 12)

ANNOUNCEMENT!

For some of you it will be news that the Official Memory Book of the Seventh World Science Fiction Convention (better known as the Cinvention) is now available; to others, this notice will serve as a reminder of the fact. But let it be known to all that here is a volume which no reader will want to miss—that no reader can afford to miss!

Jim Taurasi, well-known fan publisher, has described it as ". . . the prize volume of the year in fan publishing," and we think that you will agree. In almost one hundred pages of mimeographing and photo-offset pictures is the complete story of the Cinvention, seventh in an ever greater series of fan get-togethers; both the official proceedings and the behind-the-scenes happenings as reported by fans and professionals.

It's only one dollar and you'll never get a bigger bargain for your dollar. Every fan should have one—Memory Book, that is. So rush your dollar now to

Don Ford.
Box 116,
Sharonville, Ohio.

WANTS OLD YARNS FIRST

Please use some Fantasy stories from the Frank A. Munsey magazines that were published around 1915-1921. The authors then were G. A. England, Austin Hall, and Homer Eon Flint. Recently I had an opportunity to look through some old *All-Stories* but the Fantasy stories were mostly missing.

I would like to see "The Queen of Life," "After a Million Years," and "Treasures of Tantalus." There is some doubt in my mind whether "A Man Named Jones," "Island of Lost Souls" and "Sarah Was Judith" are completely fantastic.

Certain of the early stories may be of poor quality such as "Out of the Moon," but others surely are better written.

Please print some of the older stories. Then soon we can have the newer stories such as "Drink We Deep" by A. L. Zagat.

John H. Preble.
1409 Oak Grove Ave.,
Steubenville, Ohio.

ABOUT WALTON'S STORY

I have just finished reading the November issue. And I am so enthusiastic about the "Cross of Mercrux" I must send a line. It's the best in a long time. Better than "Hothouse World" which I found rather unconvincing and illogical. Written as late as 1931 its science seems oddly backward—an open airplane! Electricity that needs fueling—why didn't they build by or utilize water power? No advance in foods or production of foods! We could do so much better today. But Harry Walton's time idea is new, to me at least. Thanks for

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

printing my letter and thanks to all who wrote me. I haven't had time to answer all yet.

Always best—
Marian McM. Wilson

Roderville Rt.
Casper, Wyoming.

P. S. Enjoyed Bok's illustrations, though figure of Grantley on p. 111 should have had cloak on. Bok is the sculpty artist.

A CORRECTION

I was very pleased to see my letter of thanks in this (Nov.) ish of F.N. but the number of my address (as it was then) in Buffalo was 938 Humboldt Pky., not 138 Humboldt Pky. as you printed it. Most likely I made the error, but I'd sure be very glad if you'd correct it in your next ish (to be printed yet, that is) or give my new address. Thanks a lot!

Paul Glen Wright.

938 Humboldt Pkwy.,
Buffalo 11, N. Y.
or my new address:
Rm. No. 3—45 Lawn St.,
Rochester 7, N. Y.

SUCCESSFUL FANZINE

I returned from my vacation about a month ago and have just finished reading the issues of F.N. and F.F.M. which appeared during the summer; looking through them, I'm so happy to see the Stilson series finally concluded after years of postponement; "Woman Who Couldn't Die" was way off F.F.M.'s 1950 pace, however . . . a merely average story.

As for the November issue of F.N.: neither DeSoto or Saunders can compare to Finlay; Lawrence is OK when not overdone. Finlay covers? Good to see another old-time Munsey-yarn reprinted after some recent ones; it's nice to see a Zagat story coming up after my repeated plugging for it. He's a highly neglected author, and you have some fine stories by him available. Another author that has been neglected by you is Otis A. Kline. I'd like to add another plea to the pile wanting "Planet of Peril" and "Swordsman of Mars". Digging through the old Munsey files, you might come across these other fine titles: "The Radio Menace" (Farley), "A Man Named Jones" and "Land of the Shadow People" (Stilson); "The Fire People" (Cummings); or, "After a Million Years" by Garret Smith.

Keep those wonderful Bok illos coming; Finlay is always welcome; Paul should do pix for the real old sf novels. And, I don't think very highly of the reprinting from *Astonishing*, fine stories though they may be. These magazines are only ten years old, and in some cases less, and they are easily available for reasonable prices . . . while most early Munsey mags are unobtainable at *any* price.

Speaking of prices, I'm interested in obtaining copies of these mags in good shape with both covers: *Astounding* 1942 and earlier, *Amazing* 1930-37, *Fantastic Adventures* Nov.

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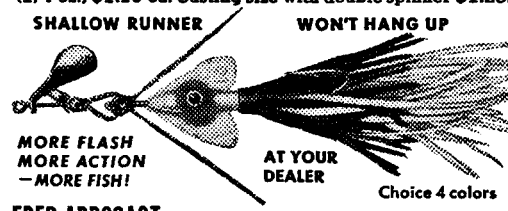

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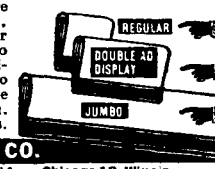

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

39, Jan. 40. F.F.M. Nov. 39, Aug,, Oct. 40, and some others before 1944. F.N. July, Sept., Nov. 1940, April 1941.

And also I'd like to mention my fanzine, *Spaceship*, which recently doubled its size and quantity . . . it's now twelve or more large-size pages for 10c, a 3-issue subscription for 25c.

Circulation is up to 100 copies per issue.

Please follow up that Zagat yarn with some of the old-time stories; digging through my files of the returned F.N. I find that 13 of the lead novels dated from before 1925, while one is from 1927 and one from '31, with the other two dated 1938 and 1943. And . . . the early stories far outranked the later ones; for every letter praising "Earth's Last Citadel" are five in acclaim of "Ship of Ishtar", "Flying Legion", "Minos of Sardanes", "Second Deluge", "Jason Son of Jason" or others of the oldies.

With best wishes for the continued success of your magazine.

Bob Silverberg.

760 Montgomery St.,
Brooklyn 13, N. Y.

FANZINE COMING UP

When, when, *when* are we going to get a cover by Bok? I'm only 18, but I'll bet I "croak" before F.N. ever has a Bok cover. Who's the wheel in charge of the artwork, anyway? Whoever it is, use a bit of gentle persuasion on him—her—it—such as brass knuckles, and see if you can't get one.

I'd like to take this opportunity to plug our forthcoming 'zine—*Infinity* which will feature sf. and science articles—*no* poetry. Contributions needed, urgently! Also, any fans interested in helping form a new club, please contact Jan Romanoff, 26601 So. Western, Apt. No. 341, Lomita, Calif. or Jim Ulanenal, 89 Ontario, Corning, New York.

Lastly—I want very much poetry collections of C. A. Smith—"Star-Treader," "Odes and Sonnets," "Ebony and Crystal," and the rest.

Will swap for these or pay cash, provided I don't have to hock my watch to do it. Am also interested in early Arkham House books—"Someone in the Dark," "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," etc.

Wait, wait—I'm not quite through yet. I'd like to thank those who were good enough to help out Paul G. Wright in so many ways; thanks all. Paul's really a swell guy, down on his luck, as many of us have been or will be some time. Who knows—he may be in a position to do you a good turn some day—and, too, you have the pleasure of knowing you helped out a deserving person. Thanks again; thanks also to the ed for seeing fit to print this.

Bruce Lane.

1630 Old Shakopee Road E.,
Minneapolis 20, Minn.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

SWAP OFFER

I would appreciate it if you would publish this in F.N.

I have 18 issues of F.F.M., F.N. and A.M.F., originally priced at $4.50, I will sell for $2.00 or will trade for the 3 *Amazings*, February, March and April, 1927.

I also have four bound copies of F.N. containing Merritt's "Dwellers in the Mirage," "Conquest of the Moon Pool," "Seven Footprints to Satan," and "The Moon Pool" which go for $2.00 or a copy of Burroughs' "Land of Terror."

Thank you.

Eldon K. Everett.

P. O. Box 513,
Tacoma, Wash.

THANKING ALL OF US

Many, many thanks for publishing a request for the "Seven Footprints to Satan" for me. I have received to date seven copies of the book and twenty-one dealers' price lists from U.S.A., Canada and Germany.

I thought that I had answered everybody but unfortunately I seemed to have missed some. And since it would be seemingly bad manners on my part to neglect to thank all the good stf. fans for their responses to my letter, I wish to thank you as their representative for making it possible to contact them.

The spare copies were not wasted and have been passed on to other fans in the armed forces to whom I send books regularly.

Once again—thank you.

Yours in mysticism,
A. J. Mannix.

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FRIENDSHIP FROM SCOTLAND

My heartfelt thanks to you for publishing my letter and to you American readers who responded. You have given me many hours of really enjoyable reading and thought. For fantastic stories are something which the brain can work on long after the story has been read.

My friends in this town are as excited over your books as I, and I have a waiting list a mile long to read them.

Captain Slater says in a later issue that we British have had to do a lot of begging from our American friends. That is quite true, and shamefacededly I am one of the first to admit it. But with science fantasy in its infancy here, and no chance of paying dollars for our books, what else could we do? One day in the near future all of us British readers of F.N. I'm sure will repay in full all the kindnesses of our American friends.

Your stories and illustrations are marve-

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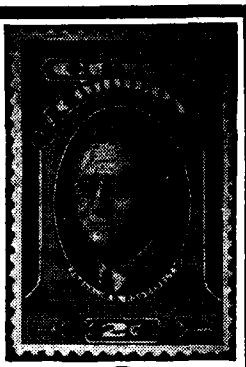

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lous, so different to our strait-laced and restrained magazines, and they are fast gaining popularity wherever they turn up.

Good luck for the future and the time when your mags have as many readers here as you have there.

Once again thank you pals for the few mags I have received and good luck.

Yours Fantastically,
N. R. Stacey.

Streen Bank,
McArthur Str.,
Dunoon,
Argyll, Scotland.

INTERESTING PLAN

I have been collecting books (mostly first editions) for many years and all along have been reading scientific and weird fiction.

In every magazine of this kind there are usually one or two outstanding stories and such stories I detach and have bound up into volumes, whereby the best stories are suitably preserved, so that these volumes can be dipped into at choice. In this way I have kept such novelettes and stories as "Flame Winds," "Sons of the Bear God," "Prisoner of Mars," "A Martian Odyssey," "Survival," "Indigestible Triton," "But Without Horns," "Giants for Eternity," "Lest Darkness Fall," and many, many more which I could name. In fact, I find it an excellent plan and one in which some of our readers might be interested.

In addition I have all but one of Burroughs' Mars series, "Liners of Time" by Fearn, Burroughs' Venus series, and so forth.

Yours faithfully,
L. Downing.

Consulate of the Netherlands,
36/7 West Bute St.,
Cardiff, Wales.

OFFERS HELP

Have been a reader of *Fantastic Novels* ever since it came out and enjoyed it very much.

Some of the stories that have appeared in the later years, to my belief, do not stand up to A. Merritt, Lovecraft, Taine, Hamilton, E. E. Smith, Hubbard, Howard, Haggard, Burroughs or English.

It has been a hobby of mine to take the letters of fans and put them in story form. It has been interesting and odd. In doing so over 75 authors of fantasy have been mentioned. So many various ideas have been stated that if you would read them set the way I have them, you would surely say truth is stranger than fiction.

Any of you readers who want old stories in magazines or books can submit your wants to me, and I will try to obtain them for you or sell from my own collection which numbers over 500 books and 385 magazines. Have been a collector for over twenty-three years.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

If any of you are interested in the odd or unknown, I can also help.

Sincerely hope to hear from a few readers at least.

Russell B. Whitworth.

1516a No. Prairie,
St. Louis 13, Mo.

TWO GRAND MAGAZINES

Would like to let you know that F.N. and F.F.M. are enjoyed in this part of the world as much as anywhere else. Am sorry that these grand magazines have only lately come onto our newstands over here.

A cover started me reading F.F.M. Before I saw the cover of "The Ship of Ishtar"—A. Merritt—issue, I hadn't known that they existed. I thoroughly enjoyed that issue, and have been shouting for more ever since.

Can't say that I've enjoyed all the issues, but the good stories more than made up for anything else.

All four of the July, 1950, stories were tops with me, and I certainly like to see a short novelette after the main dish.

"The Flying Legion," and "The Starkenden Quest" were two issues that struck me as being a waste of time to read.

All your covers that I've seen have been swell, so here's to hoping that this high standard will be kept up.

Stanley Lichtenstein.

105 Exton Road,
Bloemfontein,
O. F. S.,
South Africa.

NEEDS BACK ISSUES

I have been an ardent fan for some time, and like a great many fans like the stories you print. I need some issues of F.N. and F.F.M. from Oct. 1939 to June 1942; also a few after 1942. I have a lot of weird and fantastic books to trade for some or will pay $1.00 apiece for any issue from Oct. 1939; also I need *Strange Stories*.

Now why not print George Allan England's stories, "Darkness and Dawn," "The Afterglow" and the other one which follows? They are worth printing over again; also A. Merritt's "The Black Wheel." Please no more Haggard stories; they are so common now, but print all of Sax Rohmer's stories. They are as much fantasy as detective.

H. A. Dunster.

294 Owasco Rd.
Auburn, N. Y.

WANTS G.A. ENGLAND TRILOGY

I wish to tell you what a good story "Secret People" was, by John Beynon in F.F.M. He sure is a good writer. Also, I liked "Three Against the Stars" by Eric North, in F. N. These two are the best so far in 1950.

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FANTASTIC NOVELS

Keep up the good work and I'll always find twenty-five cents to buy one.

I see you are going to print a story of Sax Rohmer, "Brood of the Witch Queen," in F.F.M. I have the book, and it's a swell story.

How about re-reprinting "Darkness and Dawn" by G. A. England for us new readers?

Also. I'd like to see a story by Lovecraft, as I haven't read any of his. I hear that he is a good writer.

I'd like to sell some F.N.s and F.F.M.s Anyone who is interested, please write to me.

Has anyone got issues of F.N. or F.F.M. which they can trade or sell to me at a low price? I am very pleased with F.N. and F.F.M.

Your fan,
Wayne Hunt.

928 Longmont,
Boise, Idaho.

P. S. I'd like to see more of G.A. England and a fantastic story by Joel Townsley Rogers.

SELLING OUT

I enjoy most of the stories in F.F.M. and F.N., but those that most resemble Abe Merritt's are my favorites. I liked the Kuttner-Moore story. Please—more fantasy?? However, I also like prehistoric and future stories, so I'm not too hard to please. I do like a fast-moving tale that holds the interest.

I have several books for sale, and also many magazines. I'll send a list to anyone who is interested. I'd hoped to sell the whole lot to a dealer, as I figured I had over $100 worth which I'd sell for $50. But if no offers like that come, I'll sell bit by bit.

Best of luck to F.N., and please, never let Finlay get away.

Olive V. Wendling.

Morocco, Ind.

TWO BEST IN THE FIELD

This is my first missive to a magazine as I am a recent comer to the field of fantasy. I believe that F.N. and F.F.M. are the two best mags in the field.

In your last issue of *A. Merritt's Fantasy* you printed "Devil Fish" by Elinore C. Stone. I fail to see any fantasy to that.

Many of your fans request H.P. Lovecraft's tales. I've read the "Outsider" and one more; and if these tales are average examples of his work, brother, I don't like them. I'll probably receive a lot of caustic remarks about this; maybe letters, dead cats, H-bombs and rattlesnakes I must regretfully (???) decline.

I have a few odds and ends to sell (or trade for good copies of back issues of F.N. and F.F.M.). A postcard brings prices and lists. All items prepaid.

Better hurry, I'll be nineteen in November, and you know what that might mean.

Glenn Lord.

308 Marvick Drive,
Posadena, Texas.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

ALWAYS AN F.N. FAN

Well, here it is . . . yup, my bi-monthly letter to F.N. I'm going to talk about the September issue.

Now—the cover was ex . . . wond . . . supe . . . well, just WOW! Oh, that Saunders—he and Lawrence are terrific. And Finlay (but, what's this, you left him out of the Sept. ish entirely?? I won't stand for it, I tell you) should be kept on the interior all the time. He's half your selling power. Although the stories do have something to do with it.

Now to the stories. I haven't read "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian" yet, because I haven't got the first Polaris story and I don't want to read them out of order. I'm getting it soon, though.

By the way, I still need pre-'46 F.F.M. Who's got them in good condition, cheap? Or am I asking too much? Also the first four issues of F.N.

"Friend Island" was good, but I don't like the idea of the women taking over everything. Personally, I think that it is the most fantastic story you have ever published, simply on that count. "Mimic" was also good; kinda short, and kinda scary.

More Cummings, England, and Leinster would be welcome.

Always an F.N. fan,
Gregg Calkins.

%C.A.A.,
Panguitch, Utah.

PEN FRIENDS WANTED

I have just finished reading the September issue of F.F.M. What a story this "Polaris and The Goddess Glorian" is. I feel like starting over and reading it again. Your material is consistently good and I enjoy each issue as much as the one before. The shorts are interesting too.

I send each issue to my sister in Ireland and she also enjoys the magazine very much.

I wonder would it be possible to acquire a few pen friends living preferably around Buffalo or Rochester N.Y.? However, American pen friends from any other state would be just as welcome. I used to have quite a few before the last war but lost track of most of them.

I am middle-aged, married, with a grown-up family. I would enjoy hearing from F.F.M., readers so I hope some mail comes my way soon.

I just finished a trip through Buffalo and Rochester. I hope to get to New York before the summer is ended. America is a great place and its people the friendliest ever.

Mrs. Jean Low.

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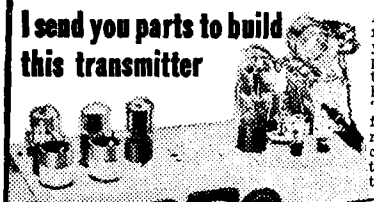

As part of my Communications Course you build this low power broadcasting transmitter, learn how to put a station "on the air," perform procedures demanded of Broadcast Station operators, make many tests.

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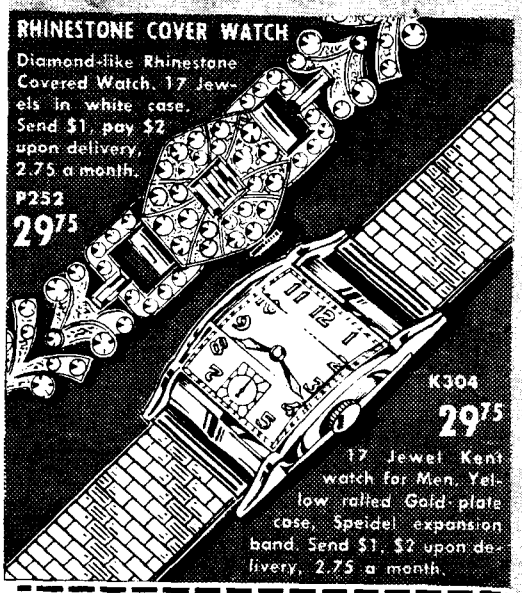

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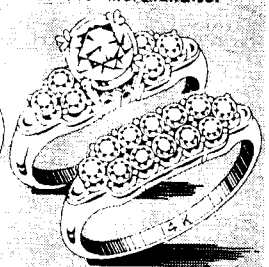

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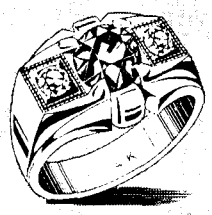

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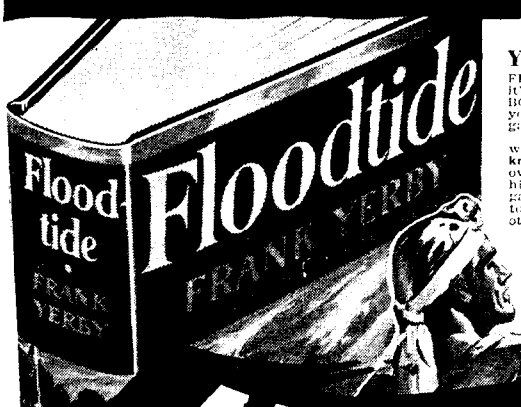

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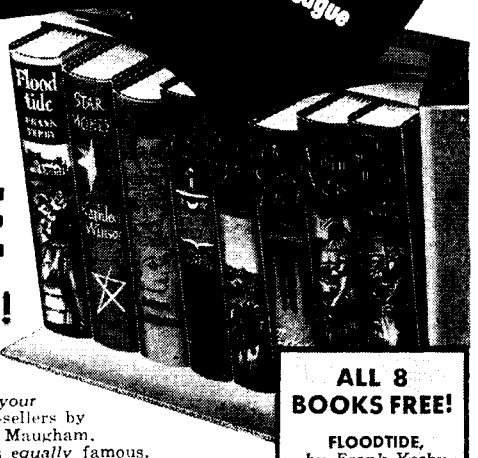

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